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THE
ELDER AND HIS FRIENDS

A.M. SYMINGTON, D.D.

THE ELDER AND HIS FRIENDS.

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THE
ELDER AND HIS FRIENDS:

Christian Friendship delineated in the
Private Letters of John.

BY
ALEXANDER MACLEOD SYMINGTON, D.D.

“Lord, and what shall this man do?”
Ask'st thou, Christian, for thy friend?
If his love for Christ be true,
Christ hath told thee of his end:
This is he whom God approves,
This is he whom Jesus loves.’

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1882.

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TO THE
REVEREND JAMES M'GILL,
BOURNEMOUTH,

IN MEMORY OF AUGUST 29, 1855.

*'The Lord deal kindly with thee, as thou hast dealt with
the dead, and with me.'*—RUTH i. 8.



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I.

INTRODUCTORY.

‘My heart is inditing a good matter : I speak of the things which I have made touching THE KING : my tongue is the pen of a ready writer.’—PS. XLV. 1.

‘All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness ; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.’—2 TIM. III. 16, 17.

I.

INTRODUCTORY.

JOHN's heart was full of good matter touching the King, but the old man's pen seems scarcely to have been that of a ready writer. His words are few, and his references, at the close of each Epistle, to the materials he was using, indicate that he found the manipulation of them rather a hindrance to the outflow of his heart. He had before him 'paper,'—not parchment, but the embryo form of what we have in such perfection and abundance, the papyrus leaf prepared for writing,—and 'ink,' a mixture of soot and water thickened with gum; and in his hand a 'pen,' a reed which had probably by this time attained the stage of being split; and with these he was forming words closely

packed together in capital letters, for cursive writing was not yet. Many a precious page had John filled thus, being 'in the Spirit,' and obeying the great Voice that said, 'What thou seest, write;'¹ but these were great public matters of revelation which must be written, which could not be conveyed to men in any other way. Here the case is different. He is writing, not to the churches, but to two private friends; and as soon as he has set down what was most urgent, he gladly puts aside the writing materials, and leaves many things to be spoken when he shall find himself ere long face to face with the Elect Lady and Gaius.

Finding that these two little books are given us as forming part of the sacred canon of Scriptures, we are forced to reflect on the structure of the Word of God. The New Testament contains twenty-seven books, four of which consist of but a single chapter, and three of them are private letters. The dignified name Epistle is fitly given to the longer treatises, that deal with great matters

¹ Rev. i. 10, 11.

of doctrine and practice, and even to the brief writing of Jude, seeing that it has nothing of a private character about it; but what Paul wrote to Philemon, and what John wrote to the Elect Lady and Gaius, are, in truth, nothing more than short letters, as simple and natural in form as any that we put on a single sheet of paper, and send to our friends every day. Do these little fragments of private correspondence belong to the Word of God in as high a sense as the Gospel according to John or the Apocalypse? Yes; in quite as high a sense.

For we must remember that the Holy Spirit is the author, not of the matter of Scripture only, but of its form as well. He did not use angels for His penmen, nor did He employ unthinking, unfeeling machines; and in using men of like passions with us, He chose persons of various characters, placed in various circumstances, and left them the fullest possible freedom of thought and expression. Men, when they would absolutely control others, must break or bribe the human will; but God's working is not after that

coarse fashion ; it is behind the will of man, and above it. It is the glory of God alone to be able to govern free agents so as to secure His own will, while allowing their wills the most unconstrained liberty ; for He is supreme over all events, and all hearts are in His hands. Inspiration lies in this absolute control of God over the hearts of His servants rather than over their pens ; He controls their pens, indeed, but it is through their hearts, which again govern their wills, and the control is thus the more perfect. He whose infinite resources achieved the bountiful mystery of the Incarnation, the perfect manifestation of God in our flesh, has wrought this twin mystery also, the expression of His thoughts and teachings in written words that are perfectly adapted to bring these home to us according to His good will. Hence the variety of writers employed, and the different forms of composition ; by these God has secured for His teaching fulness and warmth and adaptation to the conditions of all classes of men.

The circumstance that these letters were

addressed to persons in private life, one of them a woman, naturally led to their being placed in the Canon somewhat tardily ; years would pass before the treasured scraps of papyrus began to be transcribed and put into general circulation in the churches. And when they were thus published, there is evidence that they were regarded with considerable jealousy. The more sure, therefore, is the place they have held so long as apostolical and God-breathed documents, given for the instruction of the Church in all times and all places.

Only these two, out of probably a large number of private letters written by the apostle, have been placed by God in His Word. This fact also is striking. It is likely that John himself, when writing these two letters, was not aware of the fruitful immortality to which they were destined. There is an interesting parallel in the case of that saying of our Lord, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive,' quoted by Paul in his address to the elders of Ephesus, and recorded by Luke in Acts xx. 35. That

most precious maxim had not been recorded by any of the four Evangelists ; there were many other sayings of Him who spoke as never man spake floating on the lips of the early Christians, but it pleased God that this one alone should be snatched from the utter forgetfulness, or from the corruption, which must soon have been its fate unless put into an inspired writing. Thinking on the divine selection thus proved, we shall give to these portions of God's Word the more earnest heed.

The fact that these letters and that to Philemon have a place given to them in the New Testament, teaches the good use to which letter - writing may be put. The private correspondence of our day is a huge affair, undreamt of even by our grandfathers ; it is both to so large an extent concerned with matters of business necessity that it is apt to become wholly secular, and so cheap that it is apt to become frivolous. In times not yet remote, when the writing and conveyance of them required more *consideration*, letters naturally had in them

more of the heart and substance of friendship, and more direct references to things spiritual than it would, perhaps, be quite reasonable to look for in the teeming and hurried correspondence of the day. Still there is room for the suggestion that we might do more spiritual good by means of our letters if we took thought about the matter. The letters of Cowper, and John Newton, and, above all others, those of Samuel Rutherford, show to how large and abiding usefulness a man's correspondence may come. I mean private letters, honestly so called.

When a man sits down to compose a book for public instruction in the form of letters, it is another matter, and his success will depend on his literary ability.

The Elder was not doing that, but was simply writing to two friends, with no purpose beyond that of proving his friendship, in the one case by giving a lady good news of her children and needful advice, in the other by strengthening Gaius against a domineering and malicious prater: that was

all. We shall not do much good by means of our letters if we fill them out with well-set phrases about sacred things and other folks' experiences; it is bad enough to hear goody-goody things spoken in a heartless way, but the dead flies become specially offensive when such things are written. The rule for all religious utterances, whether long or short, whether spoken or written, is one that will not bear a single exception: 'He that believeth on Me, out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.' This spake Jesus of the Spirit which they that believe on Him should receive.¹ The fulness of John's heart made his letters rich in spiritual instruction, and at the same time it secured for them the charm of obvious naturalness. Let our care be that our hearts are full, and the flowing may be left to care for itself. A full heart yields the best idiom.

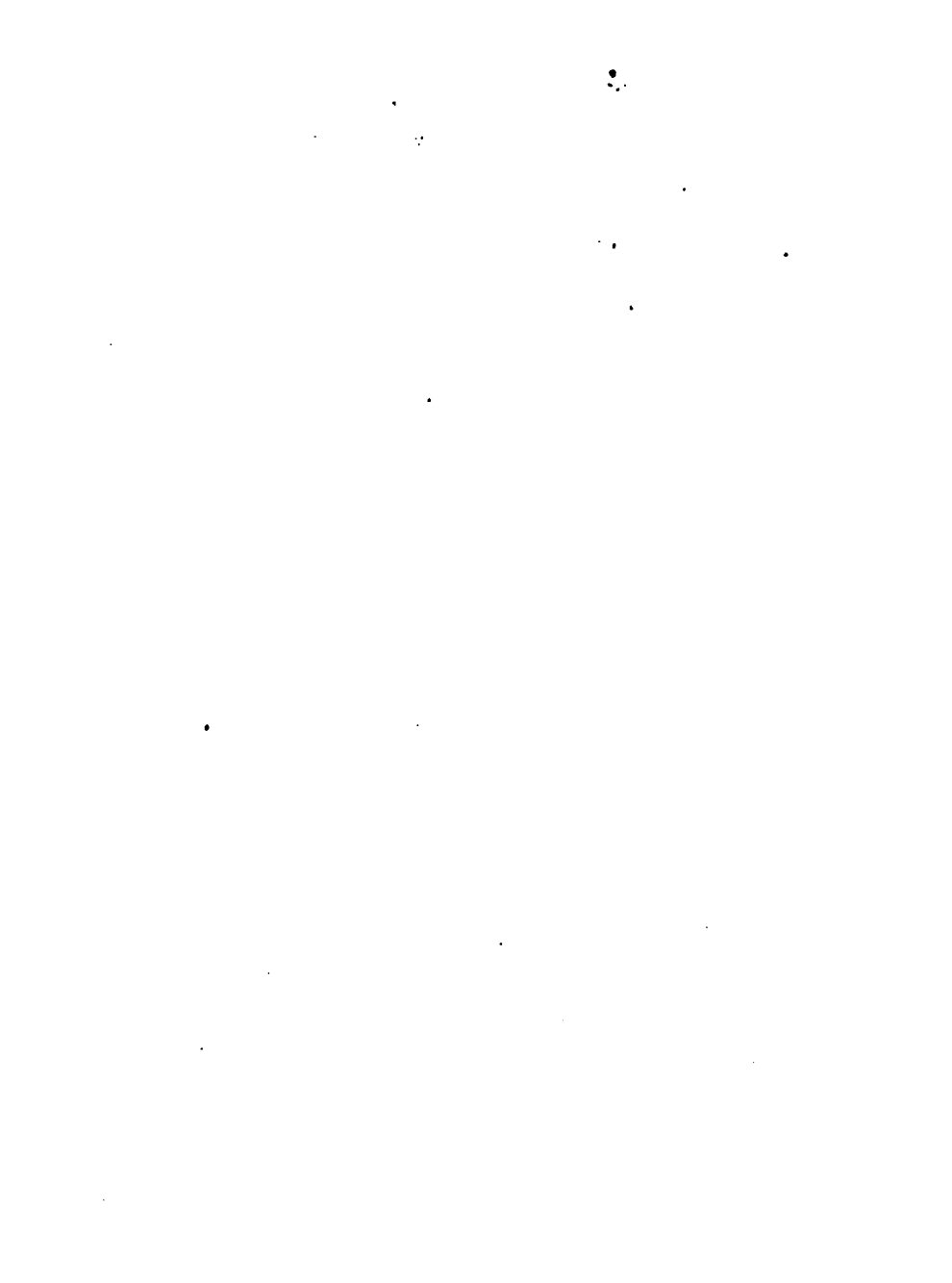
¹ John vii. 38, 39.

II.

THE ELDER.

‘Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also leaned on His breast at supper and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth Thee? Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me. Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? This is the disciple who testifieth of these things, and wrote these things.’—JOHN XXI. 20–24.

‘I John, who also am your brother.’—REV. I. 9.



II.

THE ELDER.

WE need not doubt that these letters are from the pen of John the Apostle. The Prester John, to whom some have been disposed to ascribe them, has rather a doubtful place, it seems, in history;¹ and the internal evidence is very strong that the writer is the same who composed the Gospel according to John and the First Epistle. His name does not occur in these letters any more than in those larger writings; but the voice of the Church on this matter, early and almost unanimously uttered, may be accepted without hesitation. It is rather unreasonable to think of forgery taking such a shape; but forgery was, as has been said, jealously watched against.

¹ Alford, vol. iv. p. 188.

In both letters he calls himself 'the Elder.' That title, carried over from the older dispensation, had been for many years in use to designate the office of the only rulers in the Christian Church: it was synonymous with 'overseer' or 'bishop,' and was more commonly employed (compare Acts xx. ver. 17 with ver. 28). John had indeed another and higher office, which was personal and would cease at his death; but it is worth observing that the apostles seem to have been guided to adopt this more common and permanent title as the time drew near when their special office, that of eye-witnesses of Christ in His life, and death, and resurrection, was about to expire. Peter does call himself an apostle in both his Epistles, but towards the end of the first he says, 'The elders who are among you I exhort, who am also an elder' (1 Pet. v. 1): his possession of the singular office did not lead either apostle to think less of the ordinary, the abiding office by which teaching and government are secured for the Church in all places and all generations.

John speaks of himself as 'the Elder.' One

who was simply an elder and nothing more could not have done that with any propriety. He is distinguished from all other elders by being an apostle as well, by outstanding character, by usefulness co-extensive with the limits of Christendom, by extreme age. 'These three Epistles were the last composed of his inspired writings, when he could not have been less than ninety years of age.'¹ We do not know the date of John's birth to a year, but we have very good reason for believing him the youngest of the apostles, and younger than the Son of man; so that the date of these letters would be the very close of the first, or the dawning of the second century in our Christian reckoning. Old as he was, Salome's son was still able to move about in the long-trodden circuit of the Seven Churches, and to write—although in that he soon grew weary. His longevity had already led some to put a wrong interpretation on the Lord's words about this man's tarrying till He should come again, and he had corrected that mistake in

¹ *Life and Writings of St. John*, by J. M. Macdonald, D.D., edited by Dean Howson, p. 382.

an appendix to his Gospel. Occupying an historical position all his own, as the only surviving ruler of the Church who had seen God manifest in the flesh, revered and beloved as no other could be wherever Christ was known, John might with entire fitness designate himself as 'the Elder.'

Think what a treasure of priceless memories this man carried about with him. The single period of his life embraced the lives of all the twelve Cæsars, with all the great events in the secular history of the world that gathered around these names; but that is little, little indeed. His mind, still unclouded, could at will summon up the scenes and words of Bethabara, his first gazing on the Lamb of God as He walked, the crisis when he passed from the Baptist's school to that of Jesus, he and Andrew following Him to the place where He dwelt, and 'abiding with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour' (John i. 35-39). If the Church recognized the Elder's voice, when dealing with the many antichrists of the day and with men like Diotrefes, to be a voice of thunder, he himself could well

recall the scene beside the distant Galilean lake, when the Lord had summoned him to forsake his nets and his father, and had named him Boanerges. How often had he remembered the day when Salome had asked for him and James places at the right hand and the left of the Christ in His kingdom, and when they had, if with much ignorance and rashness yet with genuine devotion, asserted that they were able to drink of the cup given to Him and to be baptized with His baptism: it was now more than fifty years since James had found the meaning of these words in the prison and on the scaffold: it was now, perhaps, more than twenty years since they had been fulfilled in himself among the solitudes of Patmos. Each reference to the blood of Christ brought moonlit Gethsemane before John's mind: each celebration of the Lord's Supper translated him to the upper room and to Calvary. How often did he run again that race with Peter to Joseph's garden! How often did a bright white cloud as he looked up remind him of the great transition, and place him once more on the green side of

Olivet! And when he saw men pricked in their hearts under the preaching of Christ crucified, and heard them crying out, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' he saw, as no other could, the lambent flames of Pentecost.

Even if there had been a man besides John who could say, 'I saw Jesus hanging on the cross,' there was no other who could say, 'I saw Him there, and I have also seen Him clothed as He is now, with the glory of the Father;' 'and He laid His right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the First and the Last: I am the Living One, and I became dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore.'¹ He could speak as no one else might aspire to speak concerning the things of Jesus Christ, both in the humiliation of earth and in the exaltation of heaven.

Christian friendship is the matter with which these portions of Scripture are mainly occupied; and that, too, was a matter of which John could tell beyond all men who have ever lived. He was the friend, in early

¹ Rev. i. 17, 18.

manhood, of John the Baptist, so near to him in sympathy that he was the first to catch the spirit of his ministry, and to follow the Lamb of God. He was the friend of Andrew, who joined him in that decisive act, and became the very first Christian missionary. He was 'the disciple whom Jesus loved.' There is a great mystery here, of which I scarcely know how to speak. The Saviour in whom we trust as God felt, as man, that yearning for human sympathies, and that delight in the interchange of the most sacred human feelings, which we feel; so that He hallowed friendship by drawing to His bosom this one out of even the chosen three. John had given to the Master the dew of his youth, and had for His sake left his father, as well as nets and servants; but James did the same, so that we cannot find there the reason why he was singled out for the distinguished honour. Indeed, while there are certain conditions which must govern all Christian friendship, no reasons that can be understood and judged of by others determine that intimate selection which one makes

of one, giving a lower place to all besides ; loving hearts are, in this, a law to themselves. To this peculiar love of the Son of man, John owed the opportunity for a profounder, more sympathetic acquaintance with Him than was enjoyed by the rest. Even in old age it is his most exalted distinction to remember that he had leaned on Jesus' breast at supper, and the impulsive Peter, accustomed to speak before them all, had beckoned to him to ask the Master a question of special delicacy.¹ The answering love thus drawn forth in John's soul secured for him the knowledge which only love can receive. It enabled him to outstrip Peter in running to the empty sepulchre, and to be the first to say of the seeming stranger by the lake, 'It is the Lord.'² Love drew John so near to the Cross that he could follow the pleading eyes (for the nailed hands could not point), as they rested on Mary, and turned wistfully to himself, and could catch words that were spoken only for her and for him: 'Woman, behold thy son,' 'Behold thy mother.' The

¹ John xiii. 23, 24, xxi. 20.

² John xx. 4, xxi. 7.

home to which he then led Mary had long since perished, when the Roman ploughshare was run over the holy city; and many years had passed since both Salome and Mary had found the consolation of the empty tomb; but John's heart is as capable as ever—more capable, if time has made any difference—of warm and generous friendship; for a Christian never loses a Christian friend whom he has loved as a Christian. The separation is keenly felt, but it leaves no hard, burned spot on the heart, because it is known to be only for a time. Many a one in Palestine and in Asia Minor had enjoyed the friendship of this man who had learned from Jesus how to love, during the sixty years since the ascension; and old as he is, his heart is large enough to embrace the Elect Lady and her children, and Gaius, and Demetrius, and the early missionaries, and the friends whom he bids Gaius salute by name. Written by such a man, these short and simple letters must be rich in all the most precious things.

The Elder's home, in so far as he had

any home, was now Ephesus. He had gone to that city after the storm of persecution that swept away Jerusalem, or shortly before that storm broke. He had been banished to Patmos in one of the great persecutions, and had returned. Both in the great centre of commerce and luxury and idolatry, and in the rest of the seven cities whose names are made so familiar by the opening chapters of the Apocalypse, John had discharged his function as the minister of Christ. He had, before his banishment, followed up the three years of St. Paul's splendid labours there by ceaseless endeavours to chase out the 'grievous wolves' whose coming that apostle had foretold, and to counteract the hurtful influence of those men who had risen up within the Christian Church itself, 'speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them.'¹ He had taught the Ephesian churches to 'try them who said they were apostles and were not, and to find them liars;' and had besought them to watch against 'leaving their first love.'² To them he had conveyed,

¹ Acts xx. 29, 30.

² Rev. ii. 2, 4

on his return, the stupendous Revelation of the Church's Head; and for them he had written the Gospel of the Word made flesh. The object of his unfainting labours is still the same.

There is a natural wish to present to one's imagination the surroundings of the aged apostle at the time of his writing these brief letters; but this wish can be only very imperfectly gratified: the details which must be put together to form such a picture are not on record. From the ascension, there is less of incident in the story of John than in that of Peter or of Paul; and the reason is instructive. It is because John's individuality does not lie in any external things, so much as in the simplicity and completeness with which he realized in himself, and expressed by his words and life, the facts of the Gospel, showing the rounded sphere of truth in its utmost polar bearings of light and love. For him these things were intensely practical, because his conceptions of them were true and complete from 'the beginning,' in which the Word became

flesh, on to the ultimate glories of the New Jerusalem, where is the throne of God and of the Lamb, and where His servants serve Him, seeing His face and having His name on their foreheads. Yet we all know what an old man is, and may safely clothe John with every feature that makes old age lovely; we can see him drawing to him the familiar tools,—scraps of paper, the viscous ink, the split reed; we can understand how his full heart grew fuller, while hand and eye wearied, as he told the mother about her children far from home, and strengthened the faithful heart of Gaius against the harsh abuse of Diotrephes.

III.

THE ELDER'S FRIENDS.

‘At the same time, saith the Lord, will I be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people.’—**JER. XXI. 1.**

‘And I entreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women who laboured with me in the Gospel, with Clement also, and with others my fellow-labourers, whose names are in the book of life.’—**PHIL. IV. 3.**

III.

THE ELDER'S FRIENDS.

ONE is tempted to give some apparent precision to our knowledge of the Elect Lady by calling her Kyria or Curia, for that is the Greek word translated 'lady,' and was a proper name; two of the early martyrs bore it. But, even though the translation has the countenance of some modern scholars, we prefer to keep by the ordinary reading; for John repeats the word in the fifth verse, and it is more natural to suppose him repeating a title than a lady's proper name,—'and now I beseech thee, lady,' seems more likely to be what John wrote than 'and now I beseech thee, Kyria.' At any rate, this last would not be in accordance with our usage.

The word is rather a social title than merely a name of courtesy; it properly belongs to one who has power over property (slaves, alas!) in her own right. It is not the respectful designation of all virtuous women, but rather bespeaks some rank and position in society, so that the words are brought to mind: 'Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.'¹ The last Duchess of Gordon used to thank God for the letter 'm' in that verse, 'for,' said she, 'if it had been "not any," where would I have found hope?'

There may be doubt as to whether we should read 'Lady' or 'Kyria,' and the point is of but slight importance. Not so the notion that this was not a flesh-and-blood woman, but a mystical way of designating a church. That view seems very forced and unnatural, for the style of address is precisely the same as that used to Gaius; some of the Lady's children are at home, while

¹ 1 Cor. i. 26.

others have gone forth into the world, and the greetings of a sister's children are sent to her. Besides, the reason which has led to this suggestion is not a good one,—the difficulty, namely, which some feel about admitting as part of the very Word of God a private letter addressed to one woman in a private position in the Church. If the difficulty be as to a private letter, it would apply equally to that to Gaius and to Paul's to Philemon; and enough has already been said on that. And if it is that one woman should have a separate book of Scripture addressed to her, I ask, Why not? He who was made of a woman has in His genealogy the names of Tamar, and Rachab, and Ruth, and Bathsheba; He undertook a journey through Samaria, and another to the coast of Tyre and Sidon, for the express purpose in each case of ministering the water of life to a woman;¹ dumb before Pilate, inso-much that the governor marvelled greatly, He yet opened His mouth to acknowledge and reward the sympathy of the daughters

¹ John iv. 4 with 34; Matt. xv. 21 with 29.

of Jerusalem ; 'Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus;' the last person to whom He spoke on the Cross was a woman, and the first word of His risen state was 'Mary.' A small prayer meeting of women near Philippi caused Paul at Troas to see the man of Macedonia giving articulate voice to the dumb longing of Europe for the true Saviour, and the women of that church laboured with Paul in the Gospel; Lydia, besides helping the first church in Europe, probably carried the Gospel to her own city, Thyatira, one of the seven that now enjoyed the care of John. Why not, then? The Word of God is only the more perfect, as a guide to persons everywhere and in all generations, for having in it this letter addressed to a Christian matron of some social position, old enough to have some of her family out in the world, and young enough to have others still at home,—a woman who is adorning the doctrine of God her Saviour by walking in the truth. It will be our own fault if we do not find that divine lessons, lessons of permanent and universal

application, are conveyed to us through means of this letter.

The chief thing about this lady—vastly more important than her station or her name—is that she is *elect*. How did John know that? He would not use so solemn a word lightly, by way of compliment; how, then, did he arrive at the definite knowledge he seems to have as to God having ‘chosen’ this lady and her sister (ver. 13) ‘before the foundation of the world’? We shall find a good answer to that question as we go on; in the meantime, remember how Paul spoke of the women who worked with him in Philippi as having their ‘names in the book of life.’ If a man is in need of theological instruction about the blessed doctrine of Election, let him go to the first chapter of Ephesians, and let him be sure that he reads on into the second chapter; for there he will find that practical side of the doctrine which must be looked at if we would understand it. Every mystery of God’s revelation has its practical side, and every plain precept has also its side of mystery; it is by per-

versely looking only at the one side that we create perplexity and error for ourselves. John knew this lady to be elect because she was 'giving diligence to make her calling and election sure;' ¹ and he was taught of God to ascribe all that diligence to the sovereignty of God's electing grace.

The children of the Elect Lady are included in the salutation. John knew those still at home as well as those who had gone out into the world, and loved them all. One naturally supposes these to be younger, and for such the Elder had, like the Master, a peculiar love, not lessening but increasing as his years advanced. Those who grow out of sympathy with children as they get older, are growing the wrong way. It is not our knowledge or our strength that prepares us for entering the kingdom of God, but our becoming as little children in purity and guilelessness, in trustfulness and love. The youngest in the Elect Lady's house is to have a share in this letter from the great

¹ 2 Pet. i. 10 ; 1 Thess. i. 2-4.

apostle, because he or she may possess a living interest in the truth about which he writes. John has not forgotten his own childhood, devoted to the God of all the families of Israel at Salome's knee, his own dewy youth given to Jesus, with the utter consecration of rejoicing love, beside the Lake of Galilee.

The name Gaius, more correctly Caius, was a very common one. A man of that name, who belonged to the city of Derbe, was Paul's companion in travel.¹ Another Gaius had his home in Corinth; he was baptized by Paul, and is spoken of by that apostle as 'mine host, and of the whole church.'² The character which the Elder here gives to his well-beloved friend would lead us at once and confidently to identify the Gaius of John with the Gaius of Paul; but the distance of time between the two—not less than forty years—forbids that, Paul's Epistle to the Romans being written from Corinth in the

¹ Acts xix. 29, xx. 4.

² 1 Cor. i. 17; Rom. xvi. 23.

year 58. But we may very reasonably suppose this Gaius to have been the son or grandson of that, for Christian hospitality is one of the hereditary virtues. It still runs in families.

The Elder's friend, at any rate, was hospitable. When missionaries came to Ephesus, they publicly declared the high Christian character borne by Gaius, and his goodness to them, not merely supplying their wants, but doing that with such good-will and heartiness as made them happy in receiving, and encouraging their hearts. He 'gave with simplicity, and showed mercy with cheerfulness.'

The character of Gaius must have been distinguished by holy wisdom, for John can trust him with his fullest confidence about the state of the Church, including his opinion as to Diotrephes. It is not every man, not even every good man, who is fit to be so trusted. And his soul was prospering, so that his friend could frame no better wish for him in respect of bodily health and temporal estate than that these should thrive

equally. A very remarkable wish that, one which would beggar some of us if granted on our behalf, and would leave us lean and gasping on a sickbed.

IV.

CHRISTIAN FRIENDSHIP.

‘And Jonathan, Saul’s son, arose and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God.’—1 SAM. XXIII. 16.

‘And now abideth faith, hope, love : these three : but the greatest of these is love.’—1 COR. XIII. 13.

IV.

CHRISTIAN FRIENDSHIP.

‘WHOM I love in the truth,’ ‘Whom I love in the truth,’—such emphasis does John put on the bond by which he was united to his friends, and they to him. Time had been when they were unknown to him by face or name: acquaintance had been formed, kindnesses had been received on either side, intercourse had been enjoyed, friendship had ripened; but it was not an ordinary kind of friendship. It did not rest on kindred, nor on neighbourhood, nor on business, nor on country, nor on common tastes and pursuits, nor even on services rendered and gratitude for these returned: it was a friendship shared by ‘all who knew the truth,’ it was ‘for the truth’s sake which dwelleth in us and shall

be with us for ever.' Christian friendship does not by any means frown upon and set aside the common ties by which man is linked to man, but it is, as here described, friendship of a distinct and higher sort.

The Truth meant much for John and for such as he reckoned friends. It was a certain body of doctrine, no doubt, held by him and them very dogmatically indeed, as we shall see; but it was not abstract doctrine; it was doctrine subsisting in the personal, historical, living Christ. He had heard Him say to the Jews, 'If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed, and ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free. . . . If the Son shall make you free you shall be free indeed.' And to Thomas, 'I am the way and the truth and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me.' And to the Father Himself, 'This is life eternal that they might know Thee the only true God and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.' And to Pontius Pilate, 'To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth.

Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.’¹ The Elder and his friends understood these words of the Son of God not only, nor chiefly, as doctrines received by the mind, but in virtue of that ‘anointing of the Holy One which is truth and is no lie.’ The things of Christ were to them intensely real, far beyond the range of doubt and discussion; and they were precious as eternal life. ‘We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness. And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true: and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.’² Words these which need rather to be pondered well than to be expounded.

It is plain that friends who hold a common relation to the truth thus understood, will be friends after a quite distinct and very lofty fashion. They have a birth and kinship not of this world: ‘having purified their souls

¹ John viii. 31-36, xiv. 6, xvii. 3, xviii. 37.

² 1 John ii. 20-27, v. 19, 20.

in obeying the truth unto unfeigned love of the brethren, they love one another with a pure heart fervently; being born again, not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, by the Word of God which liveth and abideth for ever.'¹ They live by virtue of a principle the world cannot understand, even 'the truth which dwelleth in us.' And they are practically influenced in their daily conduct by the hope of sharing the 'many mansions of the Father's house,' because 'if it were not so' the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, 'would have told them.'² These considerations, in so far as men feel them and lay them to heart, must create a friendship higher than any other, a love more enduring and richer in its fruits than the best love that rests on considerations merely of earth and time.

But if the natural tendency of the new birth and the new life and the heavenly hope of Christians to create love one to another had been enough, our Lord would not have said: 'A new commandment I give unto

¹ Pet. i. 22, 23.

² John xiv. 2.

you, that ye love one another: as I have loved you, That ye also love one another.’¹ The Elder, having taught that commandment these fifty or sixty years, reckons it no longer ‘new;’ but he repeats it none the less, and with ‘beseeching.’ For He who knows our hearts knows the need there is for a précept coming direct from His own lips, for the affecting example of His washing His friends’ feet, and for all reminders of that précept, to make us set aside the pride and earthliness, the bigotry and selfishness and manifold littlenesses that hinder us from recognizing the brotherhood of Christians and heartily acting on it in daily life. The précept is old as creation and as the second table of the law, yet it is always new in Christ—in the motive on which He makes the love to rest, in the wide and ever widening circle which He bids us embrace in it, in the fresh impulses of spiritual life from which He causes it to spring. Samuel Rutherford certainly knew much of this Christian love toward his parishioners at Anwoth, as

¹ John xiii. 34.

the letters he wrote them from his banishment richly prove:—

‘Fair Anwoth on the Solway,
To me thou still art dear;
Even on the verge of heaven
I drop for thee a tear.
Oh! if one soul from Anwoth
Meet me at God’s right hand,
My heaven will be two heavens
In Immanuel’s land!’

But there came a time when he had to learn a lesson as to loving others in the truth and for the truth’s sake. The manse of Anwoth is a lovely house even to-day, and was lovely when Rutherford inhabited it more than two centuries ago in the days of the Stuart tyranny. One Saturday a stranger came to its door and asked hospitality in the guise of a wandering beggar. When the hour came for the minister to catechise his household at evening worship, he asked the stranger, by way of giving him an easy question, ‘How many commandments are there?’ ‘Eleven,’ said the stranger. Rutherford thereupon expressed his sorrow and surprise that a man of his age and appearance should display so gross ignorance;

but the stranger justified himself by repeating these words: 'A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another.' Next morning the minister overheard his guest praying very earnestly, and asked his name. It proved to be Usher, then archbishop of Dublin, who had come to Anwoth drawn by the fame of Rutherford's piety, but was afraid to make himself known as a prelatist at a time when prelacy, in the hands of Laud and the first Charles, was working so much serious mischief in Scotland. The gulf was wide indeed between a strict Covenanter and an Episcopal ruler in these days, yet they hailed one another as friends in Christ, and Usher preached that day in Rutherford's pulpit on the eleventh commandment.

That beautiful anecdote may fitly introduce a praise of Christian friendship, the best, as it is, alas! the rarest of virtues. If I name but seven excellences which distinguish such friendship, the reader's experience may well enlarge the list.

1. Those who love one another 'in *the* truth' will love in truth; sincerity marks all

friendship worthy to be called Christian. It would by no means exhaust the meaning of the sacred words to explain them as expressing nothing more than that John loved his friends sincerely, in truth; the 'the' and the words following show us that far more is intended, but the greater includes the less. And that less is much. Other friendship may be shallow, formal, wordy, but that which has its root in recognizing something of true Christian life in another will at least be thoroughly genuine. It may not be very strong, it may find but little demonstration in words, but it cannot be a mere thing of the surface. The love of Christians may fall short in the matter of fervency, but it will always be 'unfeigned.'

2. This friendship is always fruitful. Sometimes the fruits are very large and conspicuous, even to the extent of friend sacrificing property or life for friend; but such cases are of necessity rare. Genuine Christian friendship, however, will always be distinguished by its practical character. 'Let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in

truth'¹ is its rule. Ten thousand little things done, or *not* done, and which the friend who benefits by them may not always know, are the habitual outcome of friendship for the truth's sake. And there is one fruit which from its nature is least of all seen or talked about, which yet is both the commonest and the best that friendship can yield,—prayer for one another. Often a friend may not, for very wisdom and gentleness, speak to man, but he can always speak to God. Who despises another's prayers? The man who does not pray for himself, or the man who doubts whether the prayer offered on his behalf is sincere. For myself, I am old enough to know and feel that I owe everything to the prayers of others, past and present, although I do not talk about it. Onesiphorus had a rare opportunity of proving his love to Paul (although the opportunity was not so rare as the love that made use of it). Paul could not make return in kind, but he fully requited his friend's love none the less: 'The Lord grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus, for he oft

¹ 1 John iii. 18.

refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain; but when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me. The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day. And in how many things he ministered unto me at Ephesus, thou knowest very well.’¹ There may be no occasion for the cup of cold water, and the friend who wishes to let his love find utterance may be too poor to give a shilling, still friend can always give to friend that which is more precious than all riches. The nearest way to any heart is, as has been said, round about by heaven; and it may be added, that we can all draw without stint on the store of heavenly gifts, for our friends as much as for ourselves.

Alas! that one should have to feel, in describing Christian friendship, that he is painting an ideal of which he can give but few instances! A scriptural ideal, however, expresses the truth in its highest form, and is therefore the best for us to contemplate. And it may well be that when we come, in a nightless heaven where we shall know even as

¹ 2 Tim. i. 16-18.

we are known, to consider the structure of our 'web of time,' it shall be discovered that prayers of friends have had much more to do with that web than we just now imagine. Our graces, especially that chief grace humility, are in too green and tender a state as yet to make it safe for us to know everything in this matter. In the meantime, let each of us see to it, without many words spoken to man, that our friends receive at least their first and best fruit of our love for them, frequent and sincere intercession.

3. Christian friendship may sometimes be severe. A friend, in proportion to the purity and spiritual intensity of his love, will discern faults and weaknesses and dangers which, for friendship's sake, he must not wink at. The precept of Scripture, and a very old one, is, 'Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart; thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him.'¹ Here we are on very delicate ground. First of all, the warning about moles and beams must be obeyed on our knees.² Next, what-

¹ Lev. xix. 17.

² Matt. vii. 1-5.

ever is said or done must be preceded by special prayer : 'If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and He shall give him life for them that sin not unto death.'¹ If our love be not strong enough to enable us to take these preliminary steps heartily, we had much better do nothing at all. Then we must give heed to the words, 'Let the righteous smite me ; it shall be a kindness : and let him reprove me ; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head.'² 'Oil !' penetrating, indeed, but softening and fragrant ; that is what Christian rebuke must be. How many sudden, rash blows, breaking men's heads and hearts too, without warning or scruple, impudently claim to be reckoned fruits of Christian friendship ! And how often are the Master's counsels forgotten about the tender care that should be taken of a brother's reputation by speaking to him first alone.³ But the difficulty of the duty is no good reason for neglecting it. Only Christian friendship can afford to perform it ; and when it is performed, the gain

¹ 1 John v. 16.² Ps. cxli. 5.³ Matt. xviii. 15.

is great on both sides ; 'for yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities.'

4. This friendship hallows and strengthens all the other ties that bind us one to another. It by no means loosens these ties, or makes little of them. Let both husband and wife, both parent and child, both brother and sister, add to the tie of earthly kindred this love in the truth and for the truth's sake, and their union will be far closer and more fruitful. Let friend add this love to whatever of natural sympathies and common occupations and interests have caused him to make another his friend, and the result will be all and only good. Then we shall 'bear one another's burdens' in such fashion as to be 'fulfilling the law of Christ.'¹ The beauty of David's face and his heroic bearing had something to do with the beginning of Jonathan's friendship for him ; but something else had entered into the friendship on both sides before that day on which the noblest of friends went to the fugitive in the wilderness of Ziph and 'strengthened his hand in God.' And

¹ Gal. vi. 2.

this added element ought, it is manifest, to be found among those who call themselves Christians; if we ought to love one another just as Christians, still more should love for the truth's sake and in the truth consecrate all unions of kindred or affection. And the benefits would be many. A friendship that has this element in it, although it be between men who have no natural ties in common, will be better in its results than the closest earthly relationship where love in the truth is wanting.

5. For it is another distinguishing excellence of Christian friendship that it bears strain best. Some friendships bear no strain, however slight: call them not friendships! And even brother and sister get estranged, and husband and wife; for sin can work so violent havoc as that, bursting the very bonds of nature. But the glory of this friendship is that its opposition to sin, its victory over it through the grace of Christ, constitutes its first principle. Therefore the strain of separation, of long lapse of years without intercourse, of changes of fortune, of difficult

sacrifices required, of misunderstanding even or neglect on one side, does not break it. This love yields mutual gentleness and forbearance and tender-heartedness. The lines of Christian affection reach far, and go often out of sight for long; but they have both the endurance and the quickness of electricity, answering to the true touch at either end. Nay, strain and trial, which sunder other friendships, strengthen this. I fancy there had been few interchanges of kindness between Jeremiah and the negro slave Ebed-melech before the prophet was flung into the dungeon. Certainly both Jeremiah and Paul knew more of the friendship of Ebed-melech and Onesiphorus in their prison days than they had known before.¹

6. And Christian friendship has the widest reach. It boasts of its comprehensiveness here—‘and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth.’ The difference of nation and church and social rank do not hinder it. Certain recent alliances and con-

¹ See Jer. xxxviii., xxxix. 15–18. Also the concluding chapter in the author's *The Last First*.

gresses have hopefully illustrated this ; going farther back, Scotland and England found their benefit in Geneva and in the cities of Holland. Some face to face intercourse there must be, of course,—at least, some knowledge of one another ; but a little of that may serve to form the union, and once formed, it abides as the truth dwelleth in us. Robert Moffat found that when in hiding for his life, food being brought him daily by an African woman, of whom he knew nothing until she took from her bosom a few leaves of the Gospel of John, translated into her tongue.

‘Sick or healthful, slave or free,
Wealthy or despised and poor,
What is that to him or thee,
So his love to Christ endure ?
When the shore is won at last,
Who will count the billows past ?’

7. That is the great matter, the shore won at last. The crowning distinction of this friendship is that it is not dissolved by death itself. See what the aged Elder says : ‘For the truth’s sake which dwelleth in us and *shall be with us for ever.*’ Peter says the same thing : we are to ‘love one another

with a pure heart fervently, *being* born again not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, by the Word of God which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass,'¹ etc. I have something more to say about this wonderful aspect of Christian friendship at the end, when we come to the affecting words with which John closes both letters, telling his friends that 'many things' are yet in his heart unsaid, waiting opportunity for utterance. Meanwhile ponder it in connexion with your existing friendships. An end of these must come, and soon, except in so far as they are formed on the truth dwelling in us. But if that be the bond, the Word assures us that we 'are come to the general assembly and church of first-born persons, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,' as certainly as 'to God the Judge of all and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant.'²

Why is there so little of this noblest friendship enjoyed? We may best answer

¹ 1 Pet. i. 22-25.

² Heb. xii. 23, 24.

the question by asking, How far do we regard the truth in others and in ourselves? It is enough to ask these questions. The more deeply we feel the truth in Christ, the more we endeavour to give it expression in our lives, we shall see and enjoy more of the true, enduring friendship.

And I think that when we begin to put more of practical Christianity into our friendship, in the shape of forbearance, gentleness, courtesy, truth, helpfulness, and unfeigned prayer, we shall discover that there has been more of true friendship in the world than we had supposed. 'Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering (for He is faithful that promised), *and* let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works.'

¹

¹ Heb. x. 23, 24.

V.

THE COMMON SALUTATION.

‘The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. . . . And of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.’—JOHN I. 14, 16.

‘I and my Father are One.’—JOHN X. 30.

‘Peace I leave with you: my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth give I unto you.’—JOHN XIV. 27.

V.

THE COMMON SALUTATION.

IN his short letter to the Elect Lady and her children, John does not grudge space for a salutation as copious as might have been used in a long epistle addressed to a large church. It is the common salutation or benediction that might be pronounced on any Christian, whether having little more than a decent profession, or distinguished, as this lady was, by works truly good. The salutation to Gaius is very different, such as could be offered only to the possessor of a prosperous soul, couched in words that smite and search us.

Finding what is in substance and nearly in words the apostolical benediction written out at full length at the beginning of this short private letter, sets us to think. What

familiarity has made words of course to us were not words of course or empty form to John, although he must have repeated and heard them oftener than any of us. That is one thought: we should linger over the words till they get a firm grip on our hearts, till we feel their divine meaning. If Scripture does not give us forms of prayer, it does give us certain liturgical phrases such as this, brief forms of words charged with infinite wealth of thought, in which we may always apprehend something adapted to our need, although we can never exhaust their meaning by meditation.

And another thought is this: each individual needs the whole of this benediction. The lady needs it all; the little church in her house needs it all; each of the children there needs it. Do we not often lose ourselves in the mass? There is much to be gained certainly by reflecting that we are part of the Holy Catholic Church; but we must not forget the 'we,' the 'I.' The blessing is large enough for the world, yet I *need, not* an infinitesimal share, but the whole

of it for my own soul. It presses me to realize that, when I find John saluting one woman and some of her children thus : ' Grace be with you, mercy and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ the Son of the Father, in truth and love.'

Grace, mercy, peace : the blessings stand in their due order, the first leading to the second, and the second securing the third. There is a fourth word, indeed, which includes all the three, the greatest word in any language, a word which Christianity may be said to have invented, seeing that it alone has revealed the thing that word expresses—love.¹ John reaches to it at the end of his sentence. But it could not have been used instead of grace and mercy.

For grace expresses the divine favour

¹ Archbishop Trench's *New Testament Synonyms*, sec. xii. A sentence or two may be here transcribed from that delightful book. After noticing that *ἔπος* and its compounds never occur in the New Testament, he says : ' In part, no doubt, the explanation of this absence is, that these words by the corrupt use of the world had become so steeped in earthly sensual passion, carried such an atmosphere of this about them, that the truth of God abstained from the defiling contact with them ; yea, *found out a new word for itself* rather than betake itself to one of these. For it should never be forgotten that *ἀγάπη* is purely a Christian word, no example

viewed as undeserved. It is love, but love under that special aspect. It is the same love as the Father has toward the Son: we have the Son's own warrant for a statement so marvellous in John xiv. 20, 23, and xv. 9, 10: but love to the Son could not fitly be called grace, seeing that there are in Him infinite reasons calling forth love. In us there is no such reason: love to us is sovereign, without any reason except that which exists in God Himself; and this is what the word grace precisely expresses. Grace is the fountain of every good and perfect gift coming down from the Father of lights to us who have no claim on Him, who have nothing of our own to call forth love.

Mercy, again, is more than simple grace: it is sovereign love pitying and pardoning

of its use occurring in any heathen writer whatever.' It sets forth 'that Christian love, which is not merely the sense of need, of emptiness, of poverty, with the longing after fulness, not the yearning after an invisible Beauty, but a love to God and to man, which is the consequence of God's love already shed abroad in the hearts of His people. The mere longing and yearning, which *ἵπνος* at the best would imply, has given place, since the Incarnation, to the love which is not in desire only, but also in possession.' Those *who care little for the philological point*, may yet fully apprehend *the deep truth of these last words.*

sinners, those who positively deserve ill from God.

John, loving this woman in the truth, will not pay her the insincere compliment of assuming that she has no sins needing to be forgiven. All God's blessings come to her, as to any believer, because God is merciful, because God has forgiven her in His sovereign goodness. John does not take it for granted even that God's pardon had all been given on the day of her conversion, and that she had no need to be concerned about or to ask for pardon any more. The experience of David is still the experience of every believer, however advanced in grace: 'Be merciful unto me, O Lord, for I cry unto Thee daily. Rejoice the soul of Thy servant, for unto Thee do I lift up my soul. For Thou, O Lord, art good and ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon Thee.' We 'come to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, as well as grace to help in time of need.'¹ It was the Elder's desire for his friend, not that she

¹ Ps. lxxxvi. 3, 5; Heb. iv. 16.

might deceive herself by thinking she had no sin, but that, confessing, she might find God faithful and just to forgive her; that every day of her life she might be able to look up to God the Father, through our Advocate, Jesus Christ the Righteous, and might be made whiter than snow, being sprinkled by Him with His precious blood.¹ Thus only do we walk in the light with God, thus only the blood of His Son *cleanseth* us from all sin.

Then peace comes in its place and order. If that peace with God, a clear and substantial reality in a crucified and interceding Mediator, then all other peace. Peace! the very name reveals a world of unrest in ourselves, and makes us long and pant after the steadfast calmness of the sky and stars above which God sits. And the longing is not mocked. Our afflictions are turned then into blessings, 'because the love of God is shed abroad as fragrance (*ἐκκέχυται*) in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given unto us.'² Cares are removed, or rather transformed, when we learn 'in everything, by prayer and supplication with

¹ 1 John i. 6-ii. 2.

² Rom. v. 3, 4.

thanksgiving, to let our requests be made known unto God; for then the peace of God, that passeth all understanding, keeps our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.¹ That is peace when the heart, trusting the Father for His grace and mercy, casts its burden on Him, and finds—not that He takes the burden from us—but that He sustains both us and our burdens.²

John, an apostle, and the greatest man then living in the church, does not pronounce this benediction over his friends in a sacerdotal fashion, but prays for them that they may enjoy grace, mercy, and peace. There is no other apostolical benediction known in Scripture; and it is open to any one in the kingdom of priests to bestow it, if only he be sincere.

For the Elder is careful to make prominent the source from whence the supreme blessing comes. It is from God, indeed, but from God in His new covenant relation to man—

¹ Phil. iv. 6, 7.

² Ps. lv. 22: 'Cast thy burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain *thee*,'—not 'it' only.

‘from God the Father.’ The time had ‘now come when the Lord Jesus no longer spoke to His people in proverbs, but showed them plainly of the Father.’ In His teaching and ordinances, in His death and resurrection, all set in the sunlight of His ascension and the mission of the Comforter, the longing of every Philip was sufficed.¹ God was now for them not less the Creator, the Lawgiver, the Judge, but He was, in Christ, also and above all the Father. ‘And from the Lord Jesus Christ.’ Here there is no distracting perplexity, there is only fulness and rest, when the heart, rather than the head, is engaged about grace, mercy, and peace. In John’s mind, the holy mystery of the Trinity was, while none the less sublime, more a fact than a mystery; for he had beheld the Lord Jesus Christ manifesting the glory of the Father, full of grace and truth, and bearing away the sin of the world. The Trinity was, therefore, rich for him in all that brings perfect rest to the weary soul; and he knew it to be the very reason of his long apostleship that he

¹ John xvi. 25, xiv. 8.

should 'declare to men what he had seen with his eyes, what he had looked upon and his hands had handled of the Word of Life, that they, like him, might have fellowship with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.'¹ He had carried the multiplying loaves and fishes to thousands from the hands of Jesus Christ; he had seen Him cleanse lepers, and cast out devils, and raise the dead; he had heard Jesus Christ pronounce pardon to sinners promptly and fully; he knew that Jesus Christ, the same night in which He was betrayed, had resisted Satan on behalf of Simon Peter, and had prayed for him, that his faith might not fail; he had heard Jesus Christ declare, not once or twice but many times, in public and in private, that in all these things He was doing the will of the Father who had sent Him: therefore John trusted Him to give peace by giving all grace and mercy with a whole-hearted and most perfect trust. He understood now, better than when he first heard them, the great words with which the Saviour

¹ John i. 1-4.

introduced His tenderest invitation : ‘ All things are delivered unto me of my Father ; and no man knoweth the Son but the Father ; neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.’¹

John puts a special emphasis on the divine Sonship of Jesus Christ, for a reason which will become apparent presently. All his familiarity with Jesus in the flesh had not made his apprehension of this truth the less, but the more clear. He had heard the Baptist bearing witness that ‘ this is the Son of God ; ’ he had himself been one of the three who heard the Father’s voice out of the excellent glory saying, ‘ This is my beloved Son ; ’ he had treasured deep in his heart the words in which Jesus of Nazareth had revealed His oneness with the Father ; and the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ was never more graciously full for him than now, when, under the guidance of the Comforter, he again

¹ Matt. xi. 27, 28.

in memory leaned on His breast or explored His spoiled tomb. If we would find for ourselves, or successfully invoke on others, the peace that comes from divine grace and mercy, we must go to God as our Father in Jesus Christ His Son. And none shall go in vain.

This benediction is distinguished by the words being added, 'In truth and love.' For so early as the time when John wrote, the blessings he prayed for had their counterfeits. We are too familiar with them. Some have notions about the general goodness of God apart from His Son, or about the compassion of Christ apart from the Father, which can bring full sufficing peace to no one whom the problems of his own heart and his own destiny are vexing. The soul demands truth. Nothing can bring peace of a genuine and lasting sort except the very grace and mercy of the Father seen in the Son, and got by personal transaction of the soul with Him. Truth, as John teaches it, is not an abstract dogma or a science, but subsists, sure and living, in the person of Jesus Christ. The love of which he makes everything is not a passion merely,

however intense ; it is an intelligent outgoing of the heart toward God and man, for which the heart can give plain reason of truth. The Christian puts the living Father in Christ instead of abstract 'Duty,' before he sings :

'Serene will be our days and bright,
And happy will our nature be,
When love is an unerring light,
And joy its own security !
And they a blissful course may hold,
Even now, who, not unwisely bold,
Live in the spirit of this creed,
Yet seek thy firm support according to their need.'

Such prayer is the best gift that friend can give to friend. And it may be written in our letters when it has been sincerely offered to God.

VI.

THE UNCOMMON SALUTATION.

‘Simon ! sleepest Thou !’—MARK XIV. 37.

‘Charge them that are rich in this world that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy : that they do good : that they be rich in good works : ready to distribute, willing to share ; laying up for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.’—1 TIM. VI. 17-19.

VI.

THE UNCOMMON SALUTATION.

‘BELOVED, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.’ Thus John salutes Gaius. It would probably be more accurate to read, ‘I wish that thou mayest prosper *in all things*,’ etc. ; and the meaning is, either that soul, and body, and estate may prosper equally and together, without supposing John to indicate an opinion as to the spiritual state of his friend ; or, that the health of Gaius and his temporal prosperity may equal the prosperity which John knows that his friend’s soul is enjoying. This last appears the more natural. But in either case the lesson is precisely the same, namely, that we should pray for the health and temporal prosperity of our friends

according to the measure of their spiritual well-being. That is the lesson. The words may have haunted some reader as they have haunted me, but we cannot honestly make them mean less. Let us seek that they may henceforth be associated for us only with healthful and prosperous experiences.

What are the marks of a prosperous soul? Different men will answer this question in different ways, yet all coming, if they draw their answer from the Word of God, to much the same conclusion. I do not begin by speaking of the new birth: that is assumed; it is not the life of the soul but its prosperity that is being inquired about. Supposing that a man is a Christian in deed, having that faith which is never separate from a new heart, the prosperity of his soul will consist, among other things, in these seven.

1. The measure of genuine humility and contrition will be the measure of prospering. 'To this man will I look, saith the Lord, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word;' ¹ and there can

¹ Isa. lxvi. 2.

be no question as to the welfare of the soul to which God looks, and with which He dwells. It is another thing from repentance, specially from that repentance which immediately accompanies conversion, the habitual lowliness and contrition. David understood it when he cried: 'Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it thee; thou delightest not in burnt-offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.'¹ This genuine and constant sense of our unworthiness and helplessness, brought and presented before God as the very offering of our hearts to Him, is better in His sight than the material heavens and earth, and than all the ordinances of worship even which He has Himself appointed; for such a heart yields glory to God not mechanically but willingly, such a heart uses ordinances with sincerity, such a heart agrees with God about His law and His Son Jesus Christ.

We may well pray that our friends' souls shall have this prosperity, having first sought it for our own souls. Paul's soul prospered

¹ Ps. li. 15, 17.

not so much by being caught up into the third heaven as through that buffeting of most humiliating weakness which forced him to beseech the Lord thrice, and which led him into such experience of the sufficiency of that grace which is made perfect only in weakness, that he thenceforth gloried in infirmities that the power of Christ might rest upon him.¹

2. A soul is prosperous in proportion to its active and conscious fellowship with God. The believing soul has, must have, such fellowship always: if it would cease entirely we would simply perish: but my reader's soul is exceptionally prosperous if such fellowship is in his case always conscious and active. One of the holiest men I have ever known used often to say, 'Remember, we must be hand in hand with Christ; but what saves us is His strong grasp of us, not our feeble grasp of Him.' Peter's union to Christ had not ceased when he slept in Gethsemane or even when he fell into his grievous sin, but his soul was not prospering then as it was when he said to the lame man, 'In the name of Jesus Christ of

¹ 2 Cor. xii. 1-10.

Nazareth, rise up and walk ;' or to the Jewish rulers, 'This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders which is become the head of the corner, neither is there salvation in any other.'¹ David's soul was prospering when the people spake of stoning him because he could 'encourage himself in the Lord his God,' even then.² Nehemiah appears to have enjoyed a long course of this prosperity, being able, as his book shows, to mingle prayer with very vigorous activity, and even in the brief pause before answering Artaxerxes to 'pray to the God of heaven.'³ We, and our friends, prosper in soul according as we enjoy this wakeful and quick converse with the God of heaven.

3. Another test of a prosperous soul is the measure of its simplicity before God. This is far, indeed, from being natural to any man or woman. The light of Christ reveals to any one who comes even near it for a time, much more to those who walk in it, the maze of intricate and persistent deceit in which our hearts are constantly moving as it respects

¹ Acts iii. 6, iv. 11, 12.

² 1 Sam. xxx. 6.

³ Neh. ii. 4.

God who searches them, as it respects even our hearts themselves. We deceive even our own souls! We wink hard at the most certain and inscrutable laws of that moral government which God maintains in the world. The blessedness of pardon received is, indeed, accompanied by 'a spirit in which there is no guile;' ¹ yet after conversion the tendency to doubleness of heart, though resisted, remains strong. Persons who, between man and man, are most sincere, truthful, upright, may be wanting in full candour of soul toward God. The soul that is *sine plicâ*, simple, in the good old Scotch phrase, *ae fauld*, like the soul of a weaned child, that soul is prosperous. We cannot ask anything better for ourselves than that we may be able to say, 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me. But verily God hath heard me: He hath attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, who hath not turned away my prayer, nor His mercy from me.' ² And if we have a friend who gives evidence of living with such singleness of

¹ *Ps.* xxxii. 2.

² *Ps.* lxvi. 18-20.

heart before God, we may safely ask for him all temporal prosperity.

4. The forgiveness of injuries may be taken as a test of soul prosperity. The standard in this matter is very high: 'not until seven times, but until seventy times seven.' And the demand is absolute: 'If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.'¹ Who conforms to the demand? who comes up to the standard? Our quickness to take offence, our harsh answers, our long-nursed grudges, our justifying of bitter things done or said on the ground of retaliation,—as though *that* were the law for Christians!—may well create anxiety in many of us about the prospering of our souls. On the other hand, we know that that man's soul is healthful who is striving to live peaceably with all men, who is living down calumny rather than fighting it down, who is returning good for evil. Ah! the sigh, 'Increase our faith!'²

5. You would not say of a man that he was prospering in this world unless he was laying

¹ Matt. xviii. 22, vi. 15.

² Luke xvii. 5.

up treasure ; neither may we say it of a man (or of ourselves) in respect of the world to come, unless the present be governed by wise regard to the future. Our Master's utterances touching this matter are strong and many and plain too, although some make difficulty where there is none. He tells the parable of the rich fool, and adds, 'So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. . . . Provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.' He tells the parable of the unjust steward, and says, 'Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye fail they may receive you into everlasting habitations.'¹ The prosperous soul understands these things ; and we ought to insist with ourselves that they are just as plain as they look. For it is not more certainly revealed that a great future is secured for us in Christ, than it is also revealed that the blessedness of the redeemed is

¹ Luke xii. 21, 33, 34, xvi. 9.

conditioned by the use they make of the things that belong to their daily life here and now. Nor is it at all difficult to see how this must be. Whatever has been done out of regard to Christ, whether the act itself be or be not conspicuous, is to be revealed in judgment, not as the meriting ground of reward certainly, but as the evidence of union to Him. The spiritual results of Christian well-doing, habitually pursued, are in their own nature everlasting; the good conscience, the escape from worldliness, the humility, the love, the joy of doing good which are thus cherished—these are things that cannot perish at death, but must go with the soul wherever it goes, and exist as long as it exists, being of its very nature. In proportion as we understand this practically—and those may do so who give only prayers, cups of cold water, and very hidden services—do our souls prosper. How did John know that his friend's soul was prospering? Look to the life Gaius was living.

6. A question that will easily and sharply test whether my soul is prospering is this,

Am I going forward? am I making progress? Growth is the law of all created life, from worms to angels; the cessation of growth is a symptom of death, a warning of its near approach. The word used about the soul of Gaius (*εὐοδοῦνται*) is one that properly expresses a good journey. There are resting-places for the pilgrim and feeding times: there may be slips and falls, and snatches of forbidden sleep; but the true pilgrim is making progress, and if he be more than just a pilgrim, if he be a prosperous one, his progress will be decided. The old habits of worldly and Christless living are being steadily supplanted by the habits of grace; his salvation is always becoming nearer than when he believed;¹ he grows in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ;² he has a goal before him, toward which he runs with patience; he counts not himself to be already perfect, but presses toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.³

¹ Rom. xiii. 11.

² 2 Pet. iii. 18.

³ Heb. xii. 2; Phil. iii. 12-14.

7. And this progress comes from the soul having a good hope. It is not enough to create a hope, in any case, that we should desire a certain thing: with the desire there must go a reasonable expectation of obtaining it: hope is good in proportion as the desire is strong and the expectation clear. The Christian's hope is Christ, to depart and to be with Him;¹ but when we consider this hope as a practical matter rather than a creed, when we apply to it the tests of well-grounded expectation and fervent desire, what shall we say about the prospering of our souls? Cowper's soul in his later days was certainly not prospering well, through sad disease, yet once in a lucid moment he sang:

'To Jesus, the crown of my hope,
My soul is in haste to be gone.
O bear me, ye seraphim, up
And waft me away to His throne.'

The misery of life forced his desire to be strong, and the sure ground of expectation which is given to every believer by the character and the promises of Him whom

¹ Phil. i. 23.

he trusts asserted itself through all the thick clouds. The man is faring well who has his soul anchored by hope within the veil; who is getting released from the love of the world; who is longing for a state without sin; and whose trust in his Saviour to bring him to such a state is growing always simpler and brighter.

And now, if these and the like are the marks of a prosperous soul, what shall we think about this wish of John for his friend?—this prayer, rather, for so the margin rightly puts it.

It is manifest that the prayer must in some cases be offered with reserve, even when our friend's soul is prospering. It was not good for Paul, concerning whose spiritual welfare there can be no question, that he should have much health and ease and worldly prospering; and when he besought the Lord thrice that the thorn in his flesh might be removed, it was not by the removal of it that his prayer was answered. The worst thing that can befall

a soul is pride: it will quickly eat out all good, like a cancer: and that fatal thing was prevented, Paul tells us, in his case, by this miserable and humiliating buffeting. And the prosperity of Jacob's soul was secured by halting all the way from Peniel to Goshen. The inward man may be renewed day by day, while the outward man is perishing, and because it is perishing.¹ Of course we dare not pray that any friend should be impoverished, or distressed, or made sick, hoping that thereby he might be made a better man; but on the other hand, neither may we ask for our friends riches and ease and health, unless there be corresponding welfare of soul.

If this be well remembered, it is good to pray that our friends may enjoy health and may prosper in this life. These are great blessings in themselves, and largely increase the opportunities of our friends' usefulness in the world. Unharassed by pain, unhindered by a constant struggle for bread, the prosperous soul will be ready for

¹ 2 Cor. iv. 16.

larger service. It is the condition of heaven : 'The inhabitant shall not say, I am sick : for the people that dwell there are forgiven their iniquity.'¹

Andrew Fuller has a sermon on this text, in which he says : 'Alas ! there is nothing but prosperity of soul will enable us to bear worldly prosperity. Blessed be God, we have seen a few to whom it has presented no temptation. I have heard of a good man whose soul prospered alike in temporal prosperity and adversity. He had an intimate friend who used to make free with him, and, observing his prosperity, he one day thus addressed him : "Do you not find the smiles of this world, my friend, to be a snare unto you?" He pondered and said, "I am not conscious that I do, for though I enjoy much of this world, yet I think I enjoy God in all things." By and by providence turned another way ; he lost all his property he sank into indigence ; he had scarcely a competency to support him. His old friend thus addressed him : "Well, my friend, how is it

¹ Isa. xxxiii. 24.

with you now? do not you find your heart dejected in these circumstances?" "I am not conscious," said he, "that I do: as before I enjoyed God in all things, so now I enjoy all things in God. I find God to supply all my wants, and a little with His blessing is enough." This, my friends, was a prosperous soul; a soul of this description might well bear prosperity, and his friend might well follow the example of John in the case of Gaius.¹

The prosperity of our country has rapidly increased within half a century, and is still increasing. Some of the results—in education and the food and housing of the people, and in the portion of money devoted to the wants of the poor and efforts to spread the Gospel—are good and hopeful; but others of them are bad and fearful to consider—the luxury which is enervating both the lower and the higher classes; the Sadduceism creeping over the church; the pitiful hardening of lives that but a little ago seemed hopeful, tender to

¹ *Works* in one vol. p. 651. Sermons on this text are rare, and this one is worthy of Fuller's shrewd devoutness.

Christian influences. For the sake of society at home, for the sake of the church, for the sake of the world, it is devoutly to be wished that the good things of this world were more largely placed under the stewardship of men and women whose first care is for the prospering of their souls; then this huge material advancement of ours would bless mankind and glorify God.

VII.

THE OLD APOSTLE'S CHIEF JOY.

‘And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters. And all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years. And Enoch walked with God ; and he was not, for God took him.’—GEN. v. 22-24.

‘As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him ; rooted and built up in Him, and stablished in the faith as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.’—COL. II. 6, 7.

VII.

THE OLD APOSTLE'S CHIEF JOY.

JOHN gives a good reason for his confidence as to the prospering of his friend's soul. 'For I rejoiced greatly when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.' The affairs of the soul are not so entirely hidden as we may sometimes imagine. I do not see the roots of my plants ; but if they grow, and are fragrant, and bear fruit, I know better than if I could look at them that the roots are thriving. Nothing is easier than to tell whether a man is walking or standing still ; and again, whether firmly or with weary and fainting steps ; and again, in what direction. Thus John knew about Gaius

inner life. And, indeed, these two letters, short as they are, tell us about a considerable number of friends who appear all to have been walking in the same way ; besides Gaius, there are Demetrius and the Elect Lady and her children and their cousins, and the missionaries whose visit to John seems to have led to his writing to his friend. Walking in the truth is that which is expected of all Christians ; yet it does not so uniformly or so fully accompany a Christian profession but that the seeing of it and the hearing about it cause lively joy. It brings into the relations of friend and friend the best kind of gladness ; for friendship is more concerned about the inside than the outside, and a good walk seen is taken as hopeful evidence of a prosperous state within, sure to end well. Observe that what made the Elder glad was the report brought by the brethren of ‘the truth that was *in* him ;’ and to explain how that came to be known, he adds, ‘even as thou walkest in the truth.’ Decay of spiritual life on one side makes friendship wretched ; vigour of *spiritual life* makes it bright and strong.

What, then, is this walking in the truth? Can we put some definite and practical meaning into the phrase? We need not linger over the figure, so familiar to us in all parts of the Bible. Enoch and Noah are spoken of as walking with God; and in his First Epistle John speaks very significantly of men walking either in light or in darkness. It carries in it ideas of steadfastness, of purpose, of publicity, of progress. The matter in question now is not an inward experience, but a course of life which men observe, and that course indicating a certain destination chosen toward which progress is being made.

For one thing, the life of one who walks in the truth will be governed by divine principles. All that has been said of the truth abiding in us makes this sure; and it is stated plainly in the former of these letters: 'even as we have received a commandment from the Father,' says John, when telling his friend how he had found her children walking in the truth. It is not the course we would take of ourselves. The standard of the new life is fixed by God, not by us; the reason of it is the will of the

Father, not our will; the strength to enter on and to keep going forward in it is His strength, not ours. When David had wandered far from the narrow way, and was getting restored to it, he cried, 'Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts; and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.'¹ When the Master would both reveal to us the goal and instruct us in the course by which to reach it, He said, 'I am the way and the truth and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me.'² If any reader is inclined to pass this observation slightly over as a matter of course, let him take the compass of truth and test whether he is quite in the right way himself for reaching the presence of God in heaven, and is making progress. Unless the life be controlled by divine principles, by a working apprehension of the things of Christ,—pardon, grace, prayer,—we may possibly enough be deceiving ourselves. Certain arctic voyagers, walking on the ice with their faces northward, are said to have suddenly become convinced that

¹ *Psa. li. 6.*² *John xiv. 6.*

their progress was southward; and the mystery was solved by discovering that the sheet of ice on which they were was a large island, which the under-current was drifting steadily in a direction opposite to that in which they supposed themselves to be going. Something like that may be happening to us if we are not giving heed to the admonition, 'As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him.'¹

For another thing, if a man is walking in the truth, his life will be pure and consistent. If I insist on a high conception of what the truth is, I must be all the more careful to press that such a conception includes all that men are accustomed to express by the word sterling. Veracity in speech, integrity in all dealing with man, a sense of honour, are sure fruits of a life governed by Christ. If the world cannot understand any higher fruits, at least let it not have any excuse for saying that these are defective or wanting altogether. The true man will strive hard to keep his practice up to the

¹ Col. ii. 6.

standard of a high profession; but he will also so moderate his profession as to keep it within the lines of his practice, that men may find truth in the place where we know they look for it most keenly. They have a right to expect it there if anywhere, I mean in the life of a man who says that he fears the living God, and loves Him who saves us *from* our sins. 'If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth.'¹ Such clear, sterling integrity before man is not all by any means that is intended by 'walking in the light as God is in the light,' but it certainly is part of that.

No; not all. For mark in what terms John expounds to the Elect Lady his conception of what walking in the truth means: 'And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk after His commandments. This is the commandment, that, as ye have

¹ 1 John i. 6, 7.

heard from the beginning ye should walk in it.'

The old apostle calls that no longer new which the Master had called new ;¹ and indeed it was not so much the commandment itself that was new as the re-issue of that commandment in Christ. The keeping of God's commandments and keeping them in love is a very old thing, and plain : the love in Christ Jesus which secures this obedience is new as a motive power, and new in the divine strength with which it unites us.

For a man to have ascertained the due balance of Truth and Love in the government of his conduct is to have made the most important of all discoveries. Love (so called), without the backbone of truth, is weakness and sentimentalism. Truth (so called) wanting love, is a grinning skeleton, is *not true*. But where love goes hand in hand with truth, many things are said and done for which no place could be found in a mere code of duty ; common things are hallowed, mean things are dignified, hard things become easy ; and

¹ John xiii. 34.

a new way is found of performing old tasks.

The difference is world-wide between the old legal spirit and the obedience of Christian love in the matter of motive. Let it be in each case precisely the same thing which is done,—for instance, dealing honestly in business,—yet it is a wholly different thing if done out of regard to the reward which man can give from what it is if done out of gratefully loving regard to the will of God our Saviour.

And the newness of love appears conspicuously in all the relative duties. It obeys while it commands; it serves while it rules; it sweetens the working of the whole social machine by bringing in elements of which cold duty knows nothing, forbearance and forgiveness and the power of such rebuke as does not break the head.¹

Better, however, than such general remarks is a practical study of this great matter of walking in the truth and love, in the light of those personal illustrations which these two

¹ Pa. cxli. 5.

letters furnish. Examples are best when they can be had: we are apt to set up for ourselves rather hard and unnatural standards so long as we deal only with the abstract.

Looking to the case of the Elect Lady we find, for one thing, that walking in the truth means *careful orthodoxy*. John is afraid that her kind womanly heart may lead her to receive men who are heretics, and possibly to imbibe some of their corrupting opinions; therefore, while beseeching her to love, he warns her not to risk her practical hold of Christian truth. I have more to say about this:¹ let it be enough to say here, what much needs to be said in these times, that while cold, loveless, barren orthodoxy is a very bad thing, there is no need that orthodoxy should be cold or loveless.

For another thing, it appears that walking in the truth means *the maintaining of Christian influences at home*. Some of her sons, and possibly of her daughters too, were out in the world, and John's great joy

¹ See p. 117 et seq.

was that he had found these walking in the truth. He expects the mother to share his joy, so that we are safe in thinking she must have worked and prayed for such a result. She had taught them the things of Christ; she had done what she could to form their habits; she had prayed, perhaps with, certainly for, them. But all these things do not represent the chief and best part of a mother's influence. I think of this lady as, by her genuine and constant love, making home the happy resting-place of her children. She may have attended a mothers' meeting: it is likely that she visited the sick; but neither of these good works is mentioned. The only good work, technically so called, that is named is her receiving Christian preachers hospitably; and it would do her children untold good to share the pleasure of these visits,—angels, not unawares, entertained. But she did not leave them to think that their food and clothes and pleasures in odd half-hours and lessons, were such unimportant matters that they might be quite *neglected* while she went to this meeting

and that; on the contrary, her love made these the chief things. And it is evident that she had not made the truth of Christ a drudgery and a terror from which they were glad to escape when away from home. It is terribly true that, in spite of all prayer and love, children may occasionally bring down their parents' grey hairs with sorrow to the grave; but such cases are exceptions: the law of the kingdom remains that love joined to truth succeeds; in this matter parents and children reap according to the sowing.

You see another of the manifold aspects of walking in the truth in the case of the missionaries, about whom the Elder says that 'for His name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles,' and by receiving whom we become 'fellow-helpers to the truth.' Following these brethren we are far away from Christian homes, away in the dark places where superstition and falsehood and cruelty reign. In the true missionary's course truth is conspicuous, the truth of God in Christ Jesus being carried by them to supplant error; and

love is equally manifest in the self-denial with which they relinquish home and gain in order to turn men from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God.

Turning to Gaius, their host, we find that *his* walking in the truth meant diligence and integrity in business, for he was not an ecclesiastic, and his prospering in all things might be lawfully prayed for; hearty interest in the work of Christ, for 'the brethren and strangers' (*i.e.* the travelling evangelists) saw that he 'did faithfully whatsoever he did toward them;' and hospitality, for his bringing them forward on their journey was 'after a godly sort.'

And who was Demetrius? We know nothing beyond what John here says so strongly: 'Demetrius had good report of all men and of the truth itself; yea, and we also bear record, and ye know that our record is true.' There was a man of that name in Ephesus in Paul's time who led the riot of the silversmiths:¹ could this be the same man, or his son? That is quite possible: He who provided a mission-

¹ Acts xx. 24.

ary for the Gadarenes in the person of one out of whom He cast a legion of devils, could turn the fanatical representative of idolatry and greed into His true and loving servant; but we have no warrant for such a supposition. Brief as this man's record is, it tells us much. He was one of those rare souls in whom abounding love made truth winsome, so transparently honest and good that nobody could say a word against him, not even the heathen who hated his doctrine, not even Diotrophes who found faults in John himself.

When men applied to Demetrius the strict standard of the truth itself, to see whether he was not gaining his popularity by some unfaithfulness, they found that the standard only honoured him as he honoured it.

We come back to the children of the Elect Lady whom the Elder 'found walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father.' Business had taken sons, marriage had taken daughters, out of the nest. John, who had known them as little ones, had not forgotten them; he sought them out in his

journeyings and 'found' them,—for they were his children as well as hers. They were keeping up the Christian profession into the mould of which their mother had run them; they were resisting the constant allurements to worldliness by which they must have been beset; they were faithful to Christ: in these things John saw them to be walking in the truth.

All this was the old apostle's greatest joy. He had many a sorrow, in the weakening of age and in the disappointment of hopes cherished about some. But these cases compensate. They mean more souls saved unto life eternal, more crowns to cast at His feet on whose head are many crowns. They mean seeds scattered from which successive harvests shall spring in coming generations: when he shall be resting from his labours, these fruits shall follow him. Ye weary workers in large cities, are you not sometimes gladdened (and humbled too) by such tidings reaching you from Calcutta and Bombay, from Sydney and Melbourne, from San Francisco and Valparaiso, about this man and that woman whom you *knew as* children, and through whom now the

holy leaven is working and the holy light spreading?

And think of the mother's joy when she read John's letter. Each one had been missed from the fireside, and sorely missed too. 'But,' thinks the good woman, 'after all the years of loving fellowship we had in it, my home was but a tent. There is another home, the only true one, about which John has often told us what the Master said;¹ and we are all journeying toward that.' No place on *earth* is so good as home; nothing can compensate for the want of it: no conduct is so disastrously unwise as that of those who seek their pleasures beyond it, who do not make it the place of their heart-rest in every sense. But it cannot stand long. Its opportunities are quickly passing, and can never return. Let parents and children make the most of them while they continue, in fostering that love which shall be perfected in the Father's house. Have you marked the end of the story about Jesus and the widow of Nain's son? It is this: '*and He delivered him to his mother.*'²

¹ John xiv. 1-3.

² Luke vii. 15.

VIII.

*CONCERNING HERETICS, AND HOW
TO TREAT THEM.*

‘If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins.’—
JOHN VIII. 24.

‘Ye that love the Lord, hate evil.’—Ps. xcvi. 10.

VIII.

CONCERNING HERETICS, AND HOW TO TREAT THEM.

SHORT as these little epistles are, they supply us with divine instruction concerning two sorts of preachers, the true and the false, and concerning the kind of treatment each sort should receive at our hands. Gaius was brought into contact with worthy brethren who went forth to preach Christ under the impulse of good motives. On the other hand, the Elect Lady was in danger of countenancing, and of having her own and her children's piety injured by certain preachers about whom the apostle of love uses very plain and strong language.

But not too strong. We may be quite sure of that. Three-quarters of a century have passed since the Lord called the sons of

Zebedee Boanerges, and the younger of the two is Boanerges still. The swift, enthusiastic force which belonged to John's constitution as a natural man is in itself a noble quality, and He who makes all things new has not taken it away, but has put into the spiritual man such deep and supreme love toward Himself as secures for that force a right direction.

This is no question of forbidding men who are casting out devils in the name of Jesus, or of bigoted hatred to Samaritans for no better reason than that they are Samaritans; it is a question of hating what the Lord also hates.¹ Those who love well must hate well. Those who love God will, for that reason, hate evil, and not shrink from denouncing heartily those who propagate errors fitted to cheat and ruin men's souls.

'This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it. For many deceivers are entered into the world who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves, that ye

¹ Cf. Rev. ii. 6.

lose not those things which we have wrought, but that ye receive a full reward. Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed; for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.'

This more than a third part of John's short letter (five verses out of thirteen) is taken up with vehement denunciation of heresy and plain warning against heretics.

We shall best discriminate what is condemned by first taking account of what is approved, as the doctrine of Christ, and of its supreme value.

John's doctrinal positions here are two: that Jesus Christ is the Son of the Father, and that He has come in the flesh. The former he has put into his salutation in a way to leave no room for doubt as to the Son being the equal of the Father, one with Him in all divine fulness; and he repeats it when

he affirms that the man who abides in the teaching of Christ, who keeps reverently within the limits of that teaching, and does not transgress beyond it into fields of unauthorized speculation, has the Son as well as the Father. The latter doctrine he asserts and reasserts in these brief letters, and in all his writings; John's Gospel, in particular, is a demonstration, both theological and historical, that the man known as Jesus Christ is indeed the Son of God, and that His incarnation, or 'coming in the flesh,' is the most sure reality. On this doctrine—for it is not so much two doctrines as one having two sides, the Godward and the manward—hang all the great vital doctrines of our most holy faith. For example, this truth being received as proven in the heart, there attaches to the words spoken by Jesus Christ an authority higher and more direct than attaches to the words of apostles or angels; these are messengers, but this is the Lord Himself. Nicodemus had to learn this: 'Art thou a master in Israel, and knowest not these things? Verily, verily I say unto *thee*, we speak that we do know, and testify

that we have seen, and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you heavenly things? And no man hath ascended into heaven, but He that descended out of heaven, even the Son of man *who is in heaven.*'¹ Again, if Jesus Christ is anything less than very God, or if, being very God, He has not truly and really become bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, but has only *seemed* to come in the flesh, then all our doctrine concerning His atoning blood melts in our hands, is transformed into something altogether different from what we had believed, and infinitely less precious; we can no longer, with Paul, speak of 'the church of God which He hath purchased with His own blood,' nor with this John of 'the blood of Jesus, God's Son, cleansing us from all sin.'² It is the same with the resurrection of Christ. Meanwhile, believing Him to be the Son of God, and to have taken our nature into permanent union with His Person, we feel His rising from

¹ John iii. 10-13.

² Acts xx. 28; 1 John i. 7.

the dead on the third day to be far more than a miracle demonstrating the general truth of Christianity; we see in that supreme event the accomplishment of His priestly work in the presenting of His blood for us in the holy place not made with hands, His living mediation as 'the man Christ Jesus,' the sure pledge of His present reign of grace, of the resurrection of our bodies, of the final judgment, of eternal glory.¹ All these things, and more, hang by the fact of the Son of God having become the Son of man; it is too little to say that if we modify our belief in the fact, we need to alter also our belief as to the authority of Christ's teaching, His atoning sacrifice, His reign as Mediator, His coming to judgment, and the conditions of eternal life; what we ought honestly to say is, that we destroy and renounce the whole of our creed concerning these greatest things when we cease to believe that 'Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.' It is not a matter requiring special learning to determine it; any plain Christian who thinks about it, like the good

¹ 1 Tim. ii. 5; Acts xvii. 31; Col. iii. 3.

woman to whom John wrote, can see very clearly how good reason Boanerges had to speak of the great fact with all dogmatic decision.

Who, then, or what were the deceiving antichrists whom the Christian matron was so peremptorily enjoined to shun, refusing them even the common salutation?

John, writing in the last decade of the first Christian century, says there were 'many' of them, and that they had 'gone forth into the world' from the church. His language in the First Epistle puts this more plainly and fully: 'Little children, it is the last hour; and as ye heard that antichrist cometh, even now have there arisen many antichrists, whereby we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest how that they all are not of us.'¹

¹ 1 John ii. 18, 19. It is well to read the whole passage, extending to the end of that chapter.

The false teachers referred to are known in ecclesiastical history as the Gnostics, *i.e.* pretenders to the true, discerning knowledge (*γνῶσις*); and, oddly enough, some of their lineal representatives to-day affect the opposite name, Agnostics, *i.e.* persons who, carrying certainty of knowledge to a given point, refuse to carry it into the deeper and more essential matters of our Christian belief; these things they will not bluntly deny, only they assert that they do not admit of being proved in the same way as other and plainer things. And so the extremes meet, agnosticism, notwithstanding the seeming modesty of the name, resting on the self-same assumption of ascertained knowledge, apart from belief of the divine testimony, as did the older gnosticism.

That heresy—imported into the church by those members of the Christian community who sought to graft the Greek philosophy upon the new faith—consisted, for its root principle, in condemning matter as the fountain of moral evil, and magnifying spirit as in itself pure. Seeing how very large a part of *the evil* in the world springs from the unre-

strained indulgence of the bodily passions, the Gnostics condemned the body altogether; they made it, rather than a corrupt heart, to be the fountain of sin; they taught that asceticism, solitude, celibacy, were the means by which virtue and holiness are to be attained, rather than faith in the blood of Christ, and active dependence on the Spirit of Christ.¹ Where such principles had been imbibed, it

¹ 'He was the holiest of men,' says Mr. Cox in illustrating this passage, 'who refused himself physical indulgence of every kind, who lived at the farthest remove from human passion, who had withdrawn from intercourse with his kind, and who, thus preserving the purity of his immaculate spirit, became absorbed in the silent and ecstatic contemplation of the divine perfections. . . . As might be expected, Gnosticism found much in the Gospel which it could not adopt, or could adopt only in modified or etherealized forms. All references to our Lord as having come eating and drinking, all His comparisons of the kingdom of heaven to vineyards and feasts, were especially distasteful to the Christian Gnostics, they holding all that side of life to be noxious and unclean. But what most troubled them was the incarnation of our Lord. The mere thought that the Divine Spirit should enter into a material body, become the subject of base human appetites and passions, and suffer the brutal handling of the cross, was simply intolerable to them, incredible. And therefore, in many subtle ways, they evaded the plain force of the gospel story. They maintained, for instance, that the Divine Spirit which dwelt in Christ was not very God, that it was only one of many emanations from the central ineffable Deity, that even this divine emanation only descended upon Him at His baptism, and departed from Him before He surrendered Himself to His enemies.'—*The Private Letters of St. Paul and St. John*, pp. 88, 89.

became necessary to get rid of the doctrine that the Son of God had truly taken our nature, in body and soul, into union with His person for ever. If they might not boldly contradict the gospel narratives, they must undermine and neutralize them. Either, said these wise 'deceivers,' it was not the true God who dwelt in the flesh of Jesus of Nazareth, or, if God had in very deed come down to earth, it was not in the way of assuming a real body, being born of a woman, passing through the weaknesses of childhood, eating and drinking, working and being weary, sleeping and weeping like any of us: the story must be interpreted on some 'mythical theory.'

Now this was captivating and plausible teaching. It seemed to honour Christianity in respect of its high standard of moral purity, and it could make effective use of all that the Word says about crucifying the flesh and being spiritually-minded. Notwithstanding, rather all the more for the degree of attractiveness with which it was clothed, did John, *moved* by the Spirit of truth, visit the teach-

ing with startling denunciation. Having already in the catholic Epistle spoken of its abettors as 'liars,' 'children of the devil,' 'false prophets,' 'antichrists,' he now in this private letter repeats the hardest of these names with unsparing emphasis. They are 'deceivers,' who mislead those whom they profess to teach; souls, following them, will find themselves cheated out of eternal life. They are not merely non-Christian, as all teachers of what is not true must be, but they are anti-Christian,—that is to say, their teaching directly subverts Christianity by taking away the true and living Christ; it denies His person, His sacrifice, His reign of grace, His second coming, His very being. They 'transgress, and abide not in the teaching of Christ;'¹ they do not, with humble reverence as becomes weak and sinful men receiving a

¹ I prefer to retain the reading of the Authorised Version here as more expressive. The thing charged against the heretics is that they do not keep within the doctrine of Christ as they ought, but wilfully going beyond it, wander out of its limits. The Revised Version, 'Whosoever goeth *onward* and abideth not in,' does not fully express this meaning, whereas 'transgress' accurately conveys the idea of wilfully setting aside the restraints of Christ's teaching on the proud reason.

divine revelation, keep carefully within the lines of that revelation, but, while professing to start from it, they go out into speculations and opinions of their own. And the result is that they lose their hold on God altogether; they 'have not God' even, whereas 'he that abideth in the teaching' of Christ 'has both the Father and the Son.' It is a severe indictment, a heavy condemnation; but it is fully justified by the facts of the case, as deserved by all, whether in the first century or in the nineteenth, who do not reverently abide within the teaching of Christ in His Word. Although those whom they influence may be slow to believe it, although the false teachers themselves may at first little dream of it, the sure and necessary penalty attached to placing the dictates of our own reason on a level with the authoritative lessons of Christ, is that we cease to have a saving knowledge of God and relation to Him as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Strong, then, as John's warning to the *Elect Lady* is, it is fully warranted. He ex-

pected that some of the zealous propagators of the new teaching would visit the city where she had her home ; and she being, like Gaius, hospitable toward all missionaries and preachers, might naturally receive them. But he tells her to shut her door fast against them, to avoid giving them even the slight encouragement implied in the ordinary Christian salutation, and to try all professed teachers by one simple test : do they or do they not come proclaiming the gospel story *as simple fact* ? and are they satisfied to keep their teaching inside the limits of that story ? There is a tradition that the disastrous prevalence of these insidious errors led the elders of Ephesus to request the old apostle to write the story of Christ from his own full knowledge ; and that, while they were gathered around him in special fasting and prayer, he suddenly gave utterance to the words : ‘ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace

and truth.' Whatever value may attach to the story, the Fourth Gospel has been given to us by the Holy Spirit for the express end that we 'may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that, believing, we may have life through His name.'¹

Another tradition, better known, may also well be true,—that, namely, which represents John as fleeing from the bath he had been about to enter lest the building should fall, because he found that Cerinthus, a teacher of these errors, was within it. The story probably had its origin in this forbidding the Elect Lady even to salute the false teachers, and admits of being satisfactorily justified on the same ground as the forbidding. For the Elder does not, by any means, prohibit her from showing pity towards these men *as strangers* or *as poor* (if they were poor); he only warns her not to bring them into her family, or to give them the least countenance *as teachers*. And this is fully consistent with Christian love, for love, as we have seen, is truth and the keeping of God's command-

¹ John xx. 31.

ments ; the encouragement of teaching that is untrue and that leads away from holy living, can therefore never be true love.

And the warning was highly necessary. A woman, and a generous woman, needed a plain test by which to distinguish the false from the true ; and she needed a plain forbidding of what she might have been prompted to by her own warm heart. The 'full reward' was at stake. If we take verse eighth according to the Revised Version, the meaning is that the full reward of 'having both the Father and the Son,'—that is, of possessing that interest in God as our Father, through His Son as our Substitute and Mediator, which brings all present and future blessing,—was endangered by her being led to transgress and go beyond the teaching of Christ. If, however, we retain the pronouns as they have hitherto stood in our English Bibles, then John is speaking of the *preacher's* reward ; he is feeling that that will be sorely impoverished if it shall be only for the fidelity of his work, if he shall not have this friend and her children for his crown of joy and

rejoicing in the day of Christ Jesus.¹ In this matter each must look to himself. John has done his work, is doing it now ; but he cannot keep his spiritual children from falling. Only the 'unction from the Holy One' can do that ; and for that unction they must take heed to themselves that they abide in Christ.²

'He that gives greeting' to a teacher of error 'is partaker of his evil deeds.' These words have been thought to wear an aspect of bigotry ; but it is not so. Truth can stand by its own strength, but error has to be supported by numbers and man's approval ; it is therefore not a fair use of charity to cover with it those who are doing mischief to souls. The temptation to do so is strong ; it is the easier way : it is popular, it looks well. But we must, in love and truth, obey God rather than popular opinion or our own impulses, lest we should speed men in the broad or prevent them entering the narrow way.

Indeed the language here positively excludes bigotry. For John is warning men to beware of substituting human opinion for the teaching

¹ 1 Thess. ii. 19-iii. 2.

² 1 John ii. 20-29.

of Christ, to be careful to keep *within* that teaching: and surely it is an abuse of language to call such carefulness bigotry. Bigotry is an evil thing, no doubt; but is it often found disfiguring those who are reverently and earnestly observing the limits of Christ's teaching *as* Christ's teaching? In my experience, bigotry has much more frequently appeared in those who had got hold of some human notion and wished to give it undue prominence. However that may be, it is certain that the best corrective of bigotry is humble, intelligent regard to the teaching of Christ. If a man has such regard himself, he will be slow indeed to condemn another who has the same regard to the supreme authority, however he may in some points differ from him. What is being spoken of in this part of the Word of God? Not differences of opinion about church government, or about baptism, or about a particular and subordinate doctrine, differences between men who are with equal sincerity keeping inside the teaching of Christ as they understand it, equally living lives of faith and prayer and obedience to the will of

God in Christ; that is not what is being spoken of at all: but it is the denial, the deceitful undermining of saving truth as to the Son of God having come in the flesh, by men who are *not* believing, *not* praying, *not* doing the will of God their Saviour. It is no bigotry to denounce such. The cheap reproach is likely to be cast on faithful men: that they may be able to bear it with good conscience, let them take heed that they judge only by the divine standard, and condemn only those whom 'the teaching of Christ' condemns, that they hate only those deeds concerning which the Master says, 'I also hate them.'¹

¹ Rev. ii. 6.

IX.

MISSIONARIES, AND HOW TO TREAT THEM.

‘The Lord gave the Word : great was the company of those that published it. Kings of armies did flee apace ; and she that tarried at home divided the spoil.’—Ps. LXVIII. 11, 12.

‘Our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.’—Acts xv. 25, 26.

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IX.

MISSIONARIES, AND HOW TO TREAT THEM.

THE movements of the missionaries of that early period seem to have furnished the chief occasion for the Elder's letter to Gaius. That prosperous soul had received the travelling evangelists after a godly sort, whereas Diotrophes, a member of the same church, had treated them with insult: there was occasion, therefore, that the surviving apostle should write, if briefly all the more plainly, approving the one and condemning the other.

The Christian Church has been distinctively missionary from the first. The charter of missions—the Master's last commission¹—began to be acted on before many years had

¹ Matt. xxviii. 18-20; Acts i. 8.

passed. The order which He had indicated for their witnessing of Him, 'in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria,' was observed, and then the way was made ready by the persecution which arose about Stephen, and by the visions sent to Cornelius and to Peter, for the extension of the church's testimony to 'the uttermost part of the earth.' A Gentile Jerusalem had been but a little time formed by the constituting of the church in Antioch, when it was called by the Holy Spirit to 'separate for His service Barnabas and Saul;' and these conspicuous ambassadors of Christ went forth among the heathen, 'recommended by the church to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled.'¹ Traces of many other less conspicuous witnesses are to be found in the book of Acts and in the Epistles of Paul; and the reference here² shows us the missionary spirit working actively in the third generation after Pentecost.

Unless it be Demetrius (ver. 12), we do not know any of these missionaries by name: they were of the undistinguished majority who can-

¹ *Acts* xiii. 2, 3, xiv. 26, 27.

² *3 John* 5-12.

not have, and probably do not seek, the prominence of an earthly record. We know that concerning them which is of far greater importance, which alone is of enduring importance, that they possessed the true spirit of Christian ambassadors. 'For the sake of *the Name* they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles.' They were labourers thrust forth into the harvest field by the Lord of the harvest, men urged out by the manifold compulsion of faith, persuasion of the truth as it is in Christ Jesus, of the universal need of mankind, of the boundless grace of the Saviour, and sympathy with His own compassion when He yearned over men as sheep having no shepherd.¹ The names of such labourers unrecorded here, are sure to be known when the Book of Life is opened;² and many of these last shall then be first: for each Carey or Duff there will then be found, we may well believe, a hundred who have served Christ as faithfully, men of love not less heroic than theirs.

But while they were moved by the only principle which can justify any one in under-

Matt. ix. 37, 38.

² Luke x. 20; Phil. iv. 3.

taking missionary work, these friends of John and Gaius did not dispense with the sanction of the church. They would not have been warranted to do that, unless the church from which they went forth had been cold and unsympathetic about the supreme concern of winning souls. In the case of Apollos and of John Mark letters of commendation were sent to the churches of Achaia and of Colosse;¹ and the same good rule had been observed in this case. 'I wrote somewhat unto the church,' says John, — the church, in whatever city it may have been, being that with which both Gaius and Diotrephes were connected. The one lovingly respected the introduction, the other proudly despised it.

Let us say what needs to be said concerning this hateful character, so sharply portrayed here. Had there not been sad reason why the Word of God should contain such a beacon, the name Diotrephes would not be so well known as it is in almost every Christian community. He loved 'pre-eminence,' — to be

¹ Acts xviii. 27 ; Col. iv. 10.

himself always the most prominent person,—the meanest form which ambition can take, the sure mark of a soul being little and ugly, the contradiction of the Spirit of Christ. Let him be the chief speaker at meetings, or, better still, let him be in the chair; let nothing be done without his consent respectfully asked and condescendingly given: then he sleeps well, and his brethren are allowed to have peace. This wretched craving grows on the man who indulges it, until no room is left for any Christ-like or generous impulse to serve his fellows. When a man demands, as Diotrephes always does, the recognition of his own pre-eminence as the price of whatever service he does to the Church, it is himself he is serving, not the Church.

But Diotrephes cannot always get what he longs for. He is thwarted by those who will do the right thing in the fear of God, and then the ugliness of the creature's soul comes out in a way that vindicates James's inspired description of the tongue.¹ He 'prates with malicious words.' We know perfectly well what he said,

¹ Jas. iii. 6.

though we have as little love for conjectural interpretations as any one ; for we have heard him too often. He talked constantly, in public and private, in brief whispers and speeches long and loud, about men running unsent, which was not true ; about the great need of *home* evangelization, forgetting that some of his hearers might ask awkward questions about his own performances in that direction ; about the growing burden of expense laid on the Church in the maintaining of these vagrant monomaniacs, although some knew that the brass of his countenance had to be accepted in lieu of the gold of his contributions ; he threw out shameful hints about what might *have been* the characters of these ‘brethren’ before they took up this knight-errantry of missions ; and he even did not scruple to speak lightly of John as abusing his apostolical authority.

Thus Diotrephes grieved the hearts of the good men whose motive was that Name which is above every name ; and so browbeat some in the Church that they went with him in his *refusal* to receive them. But others would

not be browbeaten, Gaius for one; and these Diotrephes 'forbade, and cast them out of the church' (ver. 10). It seems, then, that he was an elder, possibly a minister (Diotrephes generally contrives to be an office-bearer of some sort), with a power of discipline which he could thus abuse. The only text he could find in the Gospels bearing on his conduct was that about the treatment to which the Jewish elders subjected the man born blind, and he could not gain by appealing to that.

Thus much evil was wrought. Good hearts were wronged; the church was torn into parties; the work of Christ was dishonoured at home, and hindered abroad. It was John's office to rectify the evil to the utmost of his power; and there is still apostolical authority in the Church, although no longer residing in individual men. 'If I come, I will bring to remembrance his works which he doeth.' Meanwhile this letter to Gaius gives him most fully that ecclesiastical position of which Diotrephes would have deprived him; and for the others who joined him in giving warm countenance to the missionaries, there was

this broad and plain rule, observing which with pure conscience, they could sit easy under abuse of discipline : ‘Beloved, imitate not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God ; he that doeth evil hath not seen God.’ Addressed to Gaius, the letter would doubtless be made known to the rest whom it concerned ; and the rule thus given is one to be pondered rather than expounded. It supposes that we can discern ‘good’ from ‘evil,’ and it assures us that when we refuse to imitate evil and resolutely cleave by good, we are on God’s side. Knowing that, we should be the less concerned although men may say we are not on their side.

But it may be easier to condemn Diotrephes than to follow Gaius. Look to what is said in praise of his dealing toward the missionaries, as instructing us how we should deal by them.

‘Beloved, thou doest a faithful work in whatsoever thou doest toward them that are brethren and strangers withal.’ The things which Gaius did we can understand without *any* difficulty. He would give money for

their support ; would heartily sympathize with their zeal ; would listen eagerly to their tidings, and consult with them about the future ; would pray with and for them ; and we know that in all such things he braved the frowns of Diotrephes, and encouraged others to take the strangers' side. Whatever he did, it was a work of faith, springing from the sincerity and ardour of his regard toward the Lord Jesus Christ, and proving him a man to be thoroughly depended on because actuated by that sterling principle. It added not a little to the value of Gaius' work of faith that those toward whom it was done were 'strangers,' except for what had been written to the Church on their behalf. It was not on account of ties of kindred or familiar acquaintance that Gaius espoused their cause, but on account of what he saw of the Master in the servants. He was not coldly suspicious, but willing rather to err on the side of generous confidence. In this he resembled Barnabas (one of the only two men whom the New Testament speaks of as 'good'), who took Saul of Tarsus by the hand when all the rest looked askance at him,

suspecting the genuineness of his conversion ;¹ as he resembled the other good man, Joseph of Arimathea, in vindicating the weak against the strong.² It is, of course, quite possible that a man may err in the direction of confidence, but we are more likely to err in the direction of caution ; and the harm one may do by inadvertently helping an impostor is less serious than the harm done by discouraging sincere workers, putting stumbling-blocks in the way of Christ's little ones. This is the man whose soul is thriving, and for whose temporal prosperity it is safe to pray ; the man whose heart is in the advancement of the Gospel everywhere, who thoughtfully cheers those who are carrying the banner of the Cross into the enemy's territory, who answers the malicious words of Diotrephes by nobly generous deeds. 'Cast out,' was he ? Not from the church of John.

John says that his friend 'will do well to set forward such on their journey after a godly sort ;' and adds, including himself and all Christians under the rule he lays down, 'We

¹ Acts ix. 26, 27.

² Luke xxiii. 50, 51.

therefore ought to succour such, that we may be fellow-workers with the truth.’¹ It belongs to the very nature of the missionary’s office that home shall be no longer home for him ; he has gone forth, relinquishing domestic comforts and the delights of organized Christian society, for the sake of the glory of Christ in the conversion of sinners to Him. It is our duty, therefore, and our privilege to forward him, when his path lies through our home, in a way worthy of God ; making him feel that he has always a home in our hearts, and will be supported willingly with our substance for Jesus’ sake. This is how God takes care for His oxen, treading out the bread of life ; their work is humble and hard, monotonous and wearisome, and He forbids them to be muzzled, knowing they cannot be the worse for all they can receive *while working*. And so the whole Church shares in what is, after all, the one work of the Church, the one reason of its existence on earth. Few comparatively are

¹ The Revisers have here given us ὑπολαμβάνειν in room of ἀπολαμβάνειν ; but surely their rendering ‘welcome’ is too weak for the stronger word.

called to go among the heathen, or are fit to go; but these few represent all that remain. The work done is the Church's work; by material support, by sympathy, by constant prayer, 'we ought' to succour 'the messengers,' keeping the bond between them and us unbroken and effective, and so enjoying the blessedness of 'fellow-workers with the truth.' Missionary meetings, with their glad excitement, are good and scriptural things,—we read of such being held in Antioch and Jerusalem,¹ but they can only be occasionally enjoyed; in giving and praying for missions there is a more constant and a far more real opportunity of linking on our substance and our hearts to our daily prayer, 'Thy kingdom come: Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.'

¹ Acts xiv. 26, 27, xv. 12.

X.

MANY THINGS TO SAY.

‘And, behold, there talked with Him two men, who were Moses and Elias, who appeared in glory and spake of His decease (τελευτησας) which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.’—
LUKE IX. 30, 31.

‘In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.’—
JOHN XIV. 2.

X.

MANY THINGS TO SAY.

THE two letters close in nearly the same words, indicating that they were written about the same time, or that the Elder had a habit of finishing his letters thus. Both the Elect Lady and Gaius seem to have lived within the circuit of the Seven Churches, for, old as he is, he has the hope of meeting them soon, and talking face to face.

To the Elect Lady he sends greetings from the children of an elect sister, under whose roof he is, and whom he has told about his letter. Another family in Christ! Thus the imperishable fragrance spreads, thus the great spiritual house is cemented.

To Gaius he sends another salutation; that at the beginning was not enough to satisfy his

heart: 'Peace be unto thee;' peace in your own conscience, the calm of peace with God even while bearing the frowns of men, peace even with those who have become your enemies. And he has been careful to tell the brethren who were about him of Gaius' position, and to secure their sympathy for the man whom Diotrophes had cast out: 'The friends salute thee.'

John had many friends besides Gaius in the city where he dwelt; they are all in his heart, but his weary hand cannot set each name down in writing. Gaius knows them; let him go to each personally, and convey the old apostle's good wishes. Paul, in writing to the church at Rome, goes far in the way of naming friends; but in writing to Philippi, he breaks off almost as soon as he has begun, saying, 'whose names are in the Book of Life.'¹ Thus human love strives to copy that divine love which says, 'I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine.'²

But what arrests our thoughts most is the

¹ Rom. xvi. ; Phil. iv. 8.

² Isa. xliii. 1.

straitening of which the aged saint was conscious. He had 'many things' on his heart to be written, but he must give up the attempt to write them; if he shall enjoy the opportunity of speaking face to face, that will be better; but if not, these many things must remain unexpressed in the present state. It is one of the drawbacks attending Christian friendship here that separation must be endured in proportion to the largeness of the circle which our love embraces; we cannot be with all our friends at once, nor with the best of them as often as we would. What may be in the Father's house we do not know, only we may be sure that separation of friends there will not involve either loss or pain. Meanwhile, letter-writing supplies help against the inconveniences and injuries arising from separation,—how much help we can quickly discover by presenting to our imagination what the state of things would be if the art of writing did not exist, or if there were no post: each town would become a desert island. But after all, letters are not enough. John grew tired of ink and paper and pens; and the strongest

man, even supposing him to enjoy abundant leisure, will still feel the inadequacy of the medium. Speaking with friends must always be better than writing to them, for three excellent reasons: in one hour a man can say ten times as much as he can write in two; when 'face to face,' there is no need to wait for your friend's answers; above all, you then get the tones, the tears, the smiles which no art can express on paper.

Yet one asks, Why should not an occasional letter suffice? Alas! it does suffice in many cases; but not in John's case, just because there is so much more in his heart than can be put into his letter. Where very rare letters, and these not long, are felt to be quite enough to satisfy the demands of friendship, the reason is this simple one, that the friendship is slight and shallow—not unreal but shallow: there are few matters of common interest, and almost no sympathy. Not so with Christian friendship of the higher order; the truer and the warmer it is, the more does it crave frequent opportunity for unconstrained intercourse, in which everything that concerns

either friend may be talked over, thought freshening thought, heart touching heart, until 'joy is full.'

With Gaius John would discuss the latest tidings from the mission fields, renewing the joy of Pentecost. Both to him and to the household of the Elect Lady he would open the shining wealth of his memory, disproving the tinsel speculations of the antichrists by fact after fact concerning the words and deeds of Him on whose breast he had leaned, whose grave-clothes he had handled in the empty tomb. Long evenings would pass swiftly while he told the details he hints at in his Gospel, 'the many other things which Jesus did, the which if they should be written, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books which should be written ;'¹ and our fancy must be dull indeed if we cannot see the good merchant's prosperous soul beaming through his moist eyes, and the faces of the mother and her children, now pale with holy awe now bright with holy joy, as they listen to details which literally bring

¹ John xxi. 25.

heaven to earth. And the talk would not be all concerning things strictly spiritual. John had to give the home household tidings of the members of it whom he met abroad, and to justify by instances the assurance given in his letter that he had found them walking in the truth. When they got on these matters, you may be sure the mother's questions would guide John's words; and nothing that she knew already even from themselves could lessen her thirst to hear 'all about them' from these venerable lips. 'Full joy' indeed!

Was the hope realized? Were the Elder and his friends permitted the full joy they longed for? Ah! the question is a tender one. Probably he did see Gaius once more; probably he did sit once again at the table of the Elect Lady; probably he had another last opportunity to be made glad by friends, and to gladden them by talking face to face of all precious and gladsome things. But the last such meeting was not far off. What deathbed is it at which *every* friend is gathered? Who passes away leaving no words unspoken? Ah!

that *last* word, *last* look, *last* smile ! It is of the nature of Christian friendship that it creates affections and desires that are not dissolved by death, that cannot be bounded by time. The longer the intercourse of prosperous souls here, it does not tend to exhaustion ; on the contrary, it enlarges the love which never fails. I can suppose the apostle, when his disciples asked him concerning this desire for reunion and fellowship in a better land, whether it was a desire that might be soberly cherished with Scripture warrant, reminding them of the praise of love which Paul had written under the Spirit's guidance, telling them how his own eyes—these very eyes which now looked on them—had seen Moses and Elias in glory on the holy mount, and reminding them of how the Lord Jesus had said concerning the Father's house, ' If it were *not* so, I would have told you.'

Let this supply our closing thought. Whatever connexions of kindred and neighbourhood are already formed and beyond the control of our will, let us strive to get into them more of those enduring elements of grace which

alone can secure them from being awfully broken ere long. And what friendships we still have choice in forming, let the connexion of these with the things of Christ be the chief consideration. If we would have husband, or wife, or friend in whom our hearts may safely trust under every vicissitude and on to the end, it is essential that common love to Him who has redeemed and who is coming again to receive us unto Himself shall be the principal bond.

For even in the best Christian friend we cannot find all that our hearts need. He who called the father of them that believe His friend, who 'calls us friends if we do whatsoever He commands us,'¹ who has laid down His life for us, He alone 'loveth at all times and is the Brother born for our adversity.' 'You must have many a lonely hour,' I said to an aged Christian on her deathbed. 'Yes,' she answered, 'but Christ is always with me, and He's grand company;' and she went on to repeat some of the exceeding great and precious promises. Thus those who have Christ for

¹ John xv. 13-15.

their friend, find that His presence is made only the more sure and gracious by those events which prove the frailty or the powerlessness of earthly friendship. They learn to sing this song in the night: 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me.'

Μόνῳ τῷ Θεῷ δόξα.

